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MY RETURN

TO THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST.

BY

H. A. DES AMORIE VANDER HOEVEN,

BARRISTER-AT-LAW,
AND MEMBER OF THE SECOND CHAMBER OF HOLLAND.

A Translation from the Dutch.

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LONDON:
BURNS AND OATES,
17 AND 18 PORTMAN STREET, AND 63 PATERNOSTER ROW.
1877.

17476

PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THIS book does not profess to give any complete or scientific explanation of the Catholic faith, or of the arguments in favour of it; but merely puts before the reader the points which most strongly influenced an educated and intelligent man searching after truth. It will be found to contain many shrewd and useful remarks on religious subjects.

The original, written by Mr. H. A. Des Amorie Vander Hoeven, member of the Second Chamber of Holland, was published at Amsterdam in 1871. With regard to its translation it ought to be mentioned that some passages are left out, either because they refer to matters which would not interest the

English public, or because they are less directly connected with the author's conversion, and therefore could be omitted without doing any harm to the principal subject.

A few notes also are added, where it seemed either necessary or convenient to explain the text or to elucidate the narrative.

MY RETURN TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

"Let the mercies of the Lord give glory to Him: and His wonderful works to the children of men."—Ps. cvi. 21.

I.

A CALL, in which I cannot disown God's voice, compels me to publish the reasons why I returned to the faith of our fathers. Thou knowest, Lord, that in this solemn moment I neither wish to put myself forward, nor am I afraid of the incorrect opinions of men. Thou knowest, too, how unworthy I am to be the herald of Thy greatness, with what fear I, a poor sinner, am about to unite my faltering words with the hymns of the saints, Thy faithful and proved friends. What can I say that has not been

said a hundred and a thousand times better, in words far more eloquent, by men of greater understanding, stronger faith, and more fervid piety, in the course of almost nineteen centuries! What will my infirmity add to their strength? And yet, Lord, Thou *willest* it, Thou commandest me to overcome my reluctance, put aside my fear, and bear additional witness of Thy eternal truth. It would be sinful to hesitate any longer. O Lord, take then the result of this work under Thy guidance. Let it bring derision on its author, provided that it procures honour to Thy name! Let it bring scorn on me, provided that it bring some, if it be only one, nearer to Thy adoration! Grant me only to be as sincere and humble as possible in relating the history of my conversion.

And thou, most holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, spotlessly and immaculately conceived, who didst induce thy Son to show His Divine power, even when His hour was not yet come, have mercy on me thy unworthy child, and obtain by thy most powerful intercession that I may not write anything that may displease that Son, and be contrary to

the doctrine of His One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church!

I do not intend to satisfy vain curiosity, and for that reason there will not be found a full *confession* in this book. My life is the life of a deeply-fallen sinner, who has for a long time offended God by sins for which he is now trying to atone. St. Augustine's confessions, even where he uncovers the weaknesses of his youth, may cause a favourable impression; but the enumeration of my sins would only create disgust. Enough that my confessor had to listen to this long and sad account. May not only he, but above all, may Almighty God have forgotten it according to His beautiful promise to every truly repenting sinner. Grant me such a repentance, O Lord Jesus, that what I wish to be buried in the deepest oblivion may never be revealed! I beseech Thee, Father, rescue me from the Judge!

The reader will find here nothing but my religious conviction, mixed with the narration of those events only which were intimately connected with it.

I was very young when I lost my mother, who

was a woman of a very pious disposition. I am sure she has not ceased in heaven to pray for me, and at least *now*, whilst I am writing, she will look down upon me with delight. Yes, dearest mother, thou hast known and served the Lord as well as thou couldst—*more* than this His justice has not required from thee. Now thou knowest Him better, now thou hast found the treasure of truth and beauty which here upon earth remained concealed from thee, without thy fault. Now thou art a chosen member of the Church, the light and warmth of which thou wast unable to find in this world. Now thou thankest our merciful Saviour for the *particular* grace given to the only one of thy children, who without this special mercy would have been almost infallibly lost. For all thy other children, however much they may have gone astray in their belief, remained just and blameless; most of them were examples of morality and piety. This one, still an innocent child when thou didst leave him, was not able to give thee pain in *this world*, but alas! how long and fervently hadst thou in heaven to pray for him, before thy prayer was heard! Only a miracle could bring back

this child also to thy maternal heart that could not bear to be deprived of a single one, and behold, that miracle has been wrought. Another Mother has compassionated thy maternal tears, and obtained from Her Son the greatest of all mercies for the least worthy of thy children, because he stood in need of that mercy more than all.

My father was well known.* He was a child in evil, a clear and noble spirit, an *honnête homme* in that strict sense in which Pascal used this word as the highest title of honour.

No one who had known my father would accuse me of exaggerating his qualities in any respect whatsoever. Moreover, no one will have a right to accuse me of incorrectness when I add, that my father was *more* a man of a quick and comprehensive mind than of deep intellectual power; *more* a man of art and taste than of science. He was born to be an orator and not a philosopher.

As a Christian and as a theologian, my father was

* Mr. Abraham des Amorie Van der Hoeven was minister to the Arminian Church at Amsterdam. He was generally respected and renowned for his great eloquence.

naturally inclined to the Catholic Church. How could this be otherwise? The unity and antiquity of the Church in opposition to the dissensions and novelty of the sects, the splendour of the Catholic worship in opposition to the coldness of Protestantism, could not but most powerfully attract his peaceful and loving heart, his respect for authority, his love of order, and his æsthetical feeling.

How enthusiastic he was about the Church of the future, in which all Christians were to be united again as "one fold" under "one Shepherd;" this Shepherd being of course, in his opinion, the Lord Himself, and not the ever-living Peter whom *we*, upon the Lord's words, acknowledge to be the visible pastor of His fold in this world. How often did he complain that the Reformers, in their destructive ardour, had gone so far as to remove from the Church, not only the images of the Saints, but also the Holy Cross, the sign of victory! I myself have heard him prefer Erasmus to Luther, because the former tried to obtain *within* the Church what the latter could only achieve by means of a schism.

Moreover, it is known that after the revolution in

Rome in 1848, and the Pope's flight to Gaeta, he did not even fear to pray in the pulpit for that most noble exile whom many Christians revere as their visible pastor.

It would be, however, quite wrong to draw as a consequence from the above-mentioned facts that my father was a secret Catholic. Nothing was further removed from him than the concealment of his opinion; he was *entirely* what he seemed to be. As for myself, I am firmly convinced that, notwithstanding his theological studies, he never knew the real substance of the Catholic doctrine. That the Catholic Church has mixed the pure Christian faith with all sorts of human additions; that she has deviated very much from the doctrine of the Apostles and the first Fathers of the Church; that, especially in practice, she partly recommends, partly tolerates, many abuses; that without important concessions on her part, a re-union of all Christians is impossible—all this is considered by almost every Dutch Protestant, even by the best educated and most learned, to be an axiom of which common sense is not allowed to doubt, and the inquiry into which is deemed quite

superfluous. How few theologians amongst the Protestants in our own country have formed to themselves a correct opinion of the doctrine of Indulgences, the worship of the Saints, the remission of sins in the Sacrament of Penance; how few, when present at Holy Mass, have a clear idea of its ceremonies! For what good is it, they think, to waste time in a more exact inquiry into so plain an absurdity? But without this fundamental inquiry, guided by a firm purpose to accept the truth, however opposed to deep-rooted prejudices, it is almost impossible for a Protestant to penetrate Catholic doctrine, and still less Catholic life. I say *almost*, because God's grace grants to a few what most of them are not able to obtain, unless by excessive labour. The fruits of such a labour are to be seen in the numerous conversions among the Anglican clergy. I take as an instance the conversion of Dr. Newman,* who, in his ardent love of truth, studied the ecclesiastical history and the Fathers of the Church for a great many years, and

* See Dr. Newman's works, "The Story of a Convert," and "History of my Religious Opinions."

gradually returned to the old Christian faith. And how much nearer have the Anglicans remained to the ancient truth than the reformed Protestants! How much longer and more tedious a road have the latter to get over! How much more have they to admit of what they had rejected! It is, indeed, no wonder that so very few submit to such a labour, in favour of what they are taught to consider a cause hopelessly lost. My father was of this opinion, and he was attached to the Catholic Church by her external appearance rather than by her doctrine, which, in its essential character, remained always for him a closed book, and never showed itself to him except under the appearances of the usual Protestant caricature. I relate all this, because, in my opinion, the nature and possibility of a father's influence ought to be mentioned where the son is about to give an exact account of his own religious development.

I hope that none of those dear to me will ever accuse me of wanting respect for the memory of him, whose intercession I ask for with the Good Master whom he loved above all things. When on a certain day, whilst I was asking God for an answer, I opened

the Bible,—our Lord's words to Zaccheus: "This day is salvation come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham," produced a joyful impression on my heart, and since that time my character of being a son of *this* Abraham * has always been a great support to my hope of salvation.

* It may be remembered here that the Christian name of the author's father was Abraham.

II.

My first grievous sins are of a very early date, but very early also I was, by preference, occupied in my mind in trying to unfold the great questions of life. When a boy of thirteen or fourteen years, I would ramble alone for hours and hours, quite absorbed in thoughts of God and eternity, of the origin of evil, and the destination of man. My mind was not satisfied with what I knew as yet about Christianity. The public service which I was obliged to attend every Sunday, seldom produced any other feeling in my heart but that of weariness and disgust. How glad I was, when the never-wanting third part of the long sermon was nearly finished. How much did I long for fresh air in free nature, to begin *my* service, which I took to be much more worthy and rational, namely, to ponder over the essence of God, and the riddles about the universe and my own existence. Christ certainly was an excellent man, a true Messias,

but was not I destined to be another, at least *my own* Messias? Did not my understanding feel strong enough to master the secret both of the Creator and creation? Whom did I want but myself, and where could I find better guidance than in my own understanding?

My understanding developed and led me in numberless wrong ways. I afterwards remarked with astonishment, but not without pleasure, that I had by turns followed the principal philosophical systems, whereas no philosopher had showed me the way. At present, however, that astonishment as well as that self-satisfaction has gone, convinced as I am that all speculative philosophy, *without* having Catholic faith, as a firm basis, is confined to the eternal circle in which human reason, either through want of assistance or through self-conceit, has moved at all times.

As soon as there is a question of going further than the admittance of a personal God, Creator, and Ruler of the universe, Who rewards the good and punishes the wicked, even the cleverest philosopher, when relying upon his own strength only, knows nothing

more than an intelligent child. And should despondency not attract him to a system wherein he fancies he finds that certitude which he cannot in truth feel, he ends by a hopeless scepticism, saying with Socrates: "I do not know anything, but that I know nothing." In the same manner *my* childlike speculations were brought to an end, after I had got, by my own invention, through every pantheistic and idealistic system.

Que sais-je? So I asked with Montaigne, but at the same time getting further in my uncertainty than he did. *As for myself*, even at this moment there seems to me no conceivable mean between Catholic faith and extreme scepticism. I know the Church does not allow us to underrate human reason, and that this very neglect has been one of the fundamental errors of the Reformation. I know that man, by means of his understanding, can come to the knowledge of natural truths, although his understanding by itself never can apprehend all those truths together; but the knowledge of some truths only does not give to man's seeking mind that full certitude and rest which alone is able to content it. For that reason *my* understanding at least could

not be a lasting support to *me*, as soon as I left the stability of the rock of St. Peter. As a blind man would, I still stretch out my hands, as I did once during many years; and if I were not able now to say with St. Thomas, "My Lord, and my God!" Pilate's desponding question, "What is truth?" would still be *to me* the last word in philosophy. This was the case with me during a great part of my former life, and it was but seldom that I felt myself impelled to renew the struggle. More and more plunged in sin, I was drawn away from God, and from every thought of spiritual interests. I was eating dust like the serpent, and exulted in my shameful deeds. I forgot to pray (indeed, I had never been in the habit of praying fervently), and spoke and lived as if there were no God.

I did not fall at once, however, to such a degree of unbelief and sinfulness. My father, who only knew some of my vices, often tried to move me by earnest reproof, which sometimes made an impression on my heart. When, at fifteen years of age, I was about to be enrolled as a member of the Arminian Church, I objected to it, saying, that with regard

to Christianity I was of the same opinion with Rousseau in his "Profession de Foi d'un Vicaire Savoyard." This was true; and, indeed, that profession is nothing but a comment on the question which Pilate asked. This, of course, grieved my father very much, and in consequence he gave me several apologetic works to read. At that time I *wished* to be freed from my uncertainty, especially that I might not distress my father any more; and this desire undoubtedly influenced me in submitting to the exterior arguments in favour of Christian truth. In fact, as I was not able to bring any serious objections against it, the difficulties of my reason were silenced for the present, but my heart still remained cold, and there was no spark of *faith* to warm it. I was still in the same indifferent state of mind when my father enrolled me as a member of the Church, repeating to me St. Paul's words to Timothy: "Fight the good fight of faith: lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art called, and hast confessed a good confession before many witnesses."* Alas! how many years of wickedness there were

* 1 Tim. vi. 12.

still between that day and the time at which I *began* to fight the good fight and lay hold on eternal life, which only God's *infinite* mercy can grant me!

The feebly-enkindled light, however, went out very soon, and my soul fell into a deadly sleep. I loathed every kind of religious meditation, and even the voice of my conscience seemed to be struck dumb. I cannot say that the thought of death and of the future judgment, in this darkest time of my life—from my seventeenth till my twenty-second year—ever restrained me from sin. On the contrary, as often as I was not in a state of unnatural commotion and excitement, which, to my less-intimate friends, seemed to show an extraordinary enjoyment of life, the thought of suicide came upon me, and at last so violently, that the execution of it was to me only a question of time. It is, indeed, a wonder of God's mercy, that He did not allow the devil to master his prey in this manner. I was often on the point of fulfilling my awful design, not through remorse, but because life annoyed me, or because I thought it impossible to pay the debts which I had contracted. Neither the fear of God, which I had lost entirely,

nor the fear of death, which I was accustomed to look upon as the destruction of my existence, kept me from effecting my purpose. It was only the grace of God, a thousand times forfeited, which rescued me from the abyss, as I was about to hurl myself into it. And who knows whether that grace was not the reward of my father's secret prayers for his wicked child, whom he certainly knew was in danger, although he did not know of what kind? Who knows, whether the voice of my guardian angel did not, for his sake, often call to me: "*Not as yet,*" "Be in no hurry," "Wait still for a month, or at least for some days?"

My reckless life did not prevent me from studying as much as I wanted (for I did nothing more) to pass my examinations successfully. This, a quick understanding and a great facility for learning enabled me to do with little effort. When I was twenty years old, I was enrolled as a member of the bar at Amsterdam, and the distinction which a brother of mine had gained in his short practice as a lawyer seemed to open to me very favourable prospects, so that I had every

reason to be contented at the beginning of my career.

Notwithstanding this, before a year had elapsed, in February 1851, I set out for Java, and this departure was, with the grace of God, the first means of my rescue; for obdurate and insensible sinner as I was, I hardly should have freed myself at Amsterdam from those evil ways in which I had been so long. It seemed to me impossible to remain in that town any longer on account of my debts, about which I dared not speak to my father, but which, undoubtedly, would one day be detected. I resolved to escape through Belgium to England, where I hoped to get a sufficient living by becoming a contributor to a newspaper, or correspondent for a commercial house. Before I started, I told two or three of my friends, in secret, of my resolve; but one of them—may heaven reward him—could not endure the thought of concurring in my ruin by keeping the secret. He went to my father and disclosed the matter. This friend and a brother of mine came just in time to meet me at Antwerp, where I had stayed for a day longer than I previously intended. They

pressed and besought me to go back, assuring me, in my father's name, that my debts would be paid, and all pardoned. I yielded to their entreaties, already seeing the foolishness of my resolution, and especially because the frightful declaration to my father was no longer required. With what a heavy heart did I return home the next day from Antwerp! But I did not, like the prodigal son of the Gospel, throw myself repenting at my father's feet—no! as one injured, I dared oppose him, speak of my rights as not sufficiently acknowledged, and insist upon more liberty than I enjoyed at home. My father, grieved and wounded, rebuked me with indignation; but this well-merited reproof made me still more angry. I considered myself ill-treated, and discharged from all thankfulness. O God! God of mercy, do not to me through my child what I did to my father. Do not punish her on account of my sins. Behold the tears that are moistening my eyes, whilst I am relating the wickedness of my youth, and have mercy on me—have mercy on my child! Holy Mary pray for her!

My father *forgave* me, and I thank God that I

did not persist in my insensibility towards him. On the day of my departure—but not till then—my heart was broken, and weeping bitterly, I fell down before him and my stepmother. He embraced me, kissed and blessed me. After that day (February 25th, 1851), I never saw him again; he died in 1855. My father thought it better for me to begin a new career in new society, and therefore proposed to me to go to India. This suggestion pleased me, because I fancied that my absence from home would free me from restraint, and, moreover, a journey to strange countries attracted me very much. Not until the day of my departure did the thought come upon me what a treasure of love I was about to leave, that I had ever wilfully neglected this love, and wickedly repaid it with ingratitude. At that moment I would have stayed, perhaps, had it been possible. I started, and it was a good thing that I did so, for how long might that momentary impression have lasted?

III.

THE voyage, which lasted a little more than three months, made a more lasting impression on me, especially as I was the only passenger on board the "Boerhaave." In the first place, I was temporarily prevented from pursuing some of my bad ways, which I never afterwards followed in such a degree; then the thought of suicide went away for good, and the sight of the ocean, with all its majesty, lifted up my mind from the triviality in which it had been sunk for so long a time. What was still more important, I again took pleasure in religious meditations, and discovered the treasure of Holy Scripture, about which I had not cared the least for many years.

When a boy, I devoured the histories of the Bible as I did every book which I could obtain. I took the Bible itself to be a respectable, but tiresome book, of which I had to hear more than I

desired during my father's daily readings, as well as in church. My aversion to it was itself growing more and more, and it never would have occurred to my mind to look into it on purpose.

Now, however, all this was changed. I was delighted with beauties which previously had not made the slightest impression upon me. For the first time, God's Spirit breathed into me from the pages of Holy Scripture; for the first time, I admired the power, and the depth, and the infinite love of the Lord's words; for the first time, my eye moistened in reading the history of the woman taken in adultery, and the parable of the prodigal son; for the first time, I was enraptured with the Sermon upon the Mount. Certainly, *here* spoke more than human wisdom; *here* the way of truth showed itself. How was it possible that I had ever been tired of that most excellent book!

Each day I noted the results of my meditations in a little book which a brother-in-law had given me upon my departure, and in which he had written the following words from the first chapter of "St. Augustine's Confessions:" "*Tu*

Deus fecisti nos ad Te, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in Te."* These words, and others of the same Saint later on, came home to me. Did not *anxiety* consume my mind? Was there the least indication of peace in my heart either with myself, with God, or with the world? Whilst I was reading the New Testament, it became clear to me that rest and peace were to be found in Jesus alone. But who *was* this Jesus? In the beginning I believed Him to be an excellent man, then I felt myself obliged to admit the truth of His Divine mission, to acknowledge that He, being neither a deceiver nor a dupe, was truly what He called Himself, the Son of God, One with the Father; and lastly, I ended by confessing that Christ is God. I believed; but *how* did I believe? Alas! my faith was not a *living* one, not the faith of heart. It was neither accompanied by humility before God, and repentance of my sins, nor did it have *prayer* as its basis or its effect. I admired the greatness of God, but still I did not cast myself at His feet weeping

* "Thou, O God, hast made us for Thee, and our heart is disturbed until it finds its rest in Thee."

and imploring mercy. I acknowledged God, but neglected the Saviour. My opinion of Jesus and of the Holy Scriptures had become more favourable, but my will and heart remained still in the same state. I was taught to pronounce Christ's name with reverence, but did not feel disposed to become a Christian. Was not this impossible for me? How could *I* strive for such an ideal as I considered a Christian's duty to be? How could *I* venture upon the struggle against my passions and sensuality, and aim at a perfection from which even the young man in the Gospel, notwithstanding his blameless conduct, drew back? Indeed, Christ was God, but *I* had no concern with Christ.

In this state of mind I finished my voyage, during which the eye of my soul had opened a little, *not* in truth as a Christian, but still as a changed man. My aversion to Christianity gave place to respect, but still I kept myself apart from it. I no longer scoffed at holy things, and if others did in my presence, I could not tolerate it. When any one attacked the Sacred Scriptures, or the person of our Divine Lord in an unbecoming manner, I felt myself driven to oppose them,

and to give expression to my admiration. I discontinued the use of bad language, and even began to detest it, although I used not to pray.

My anxiety of course did not decrease. For the struggle between the *two men* revived in my heart, in which the bad one no longer exercised his power without opposition. The latter, indeed, was continually the master of my will, but my understanding was no longer in darkness. My conscience now and then raised its long-suppressed voice, and sometimes I trembled on account of the sad and reproachful look of the Good Master against whom I had revolted. I committed evil, but at the same time saw and praised good. I had become a man again, although a very corrupt one. So I went on for many years. First at Samarang, and afterwards at Batavia, I had a large practice, and attended to my business most carefully. I enjoyed general esteem as a lawyer, and had many friends. One of those with whom I had been especially familiar at Samarang wrote to me in 1869: "*Vous me dites dans votre lettre que vous n'êtes plus le Van der Hoeven d'autrefois et que vous êtes beaucoup changé. J'ai connu autrefois un Van der Hoeven bon*

enfant, bon cœur, généreux, honnête en affaires, sensible, &c., et je crois qu'il vous sera difficile d'être meilleur que je vous ai connu." Everybody understands that it is not from a motive of pride that I communicate this passage, but to show what kind of man the world considered me to be, and according to its morality it was not altogether incorrect. But I knew very well that this judgment was erroneous, and that my life was full of wickedness in the sight of God. Some people, however, had no such favourable opinion of me, and even the world was scandalised at my behaviour, as I transgressed some of those bounds of propriety, which it still always likes to have respected. For the rest, the world was always tolerant and indulgent towards me, until I began seriously to try to become a Christian.

My business and my pleasure occupied so much time that I could almost put aside the troublesome thought of God. I did not pray, I did not frequent church, and hoped to remain with God on such terms of mutual oblivion.

IV.

In the course of 1858 it pleased God to put an end to this state of things. I had just been released from an association to which I have already alluded, and which caused me more and more trouble. One rainy evening I was at home, not knowing how to spend my time, when I remembered there was an auction. I went there and bought for a trifle a "packet of books" —so I think it was called in the catalogue. Returning home, I found amongst them the two first volumes of the "*Conférences de Notre Dame de Paris,*" by Père Lacordaire. I hardly knew the name of the famous man whose works I now opened. At first I read indifferently, then with attention, with high interest, and finally I was deeply moved. "O God! Thou didst again seize me, and there was no avenue for escape! The Lord Jesus stood before me, asking, 'How long wilt thou be against Me?' No longer, O Lord, no longer! have mercy upon me!" And my

oppressed heart relieved itself by a flood of tears. Oh, how miserable and unfortunate are those who have never enjoyed such a sorrow! There is no joy upon earth which can be compared to this heavenly affliction. No matter how brief it may be, no matter how quickly its impressions are effaced, the sinner who bedews his Redeemer's feet with sincere tears, has at least for a moment been a partaker in the blessings of heaven.

I wept and prayed, now I took up the book, and now I placed it down again. The next day also I devoted to reading, and I was not satisfied until I had finished the two volumes, which, I was quite convinced, the Almighty had placed in my way.

In Lacordaire's beautiful sermons, *Catholic* truth spoke to me for the first time. I knew nothing about Catholicism, save that it had its own peculiar attractions, as my father and my eldest brother believed it to have, and as I myself had experienced in India. Although I cared little about the clergy as such, and their duties, I could not help seeing that the Catholic priest was more ardent in his zeal than the Protestant clergyman. Scarcely ever did I

visit the prison, which, from business, I was often obliged to do, without meeting one of the Catholic priests; seldom or never did I see there the Protestant minister. The latter, I am sure, visited that place, but unlike the former, he was not to be seen there every day; I noticed the same thing with regard to the hospitals. One evening, on the high road between Samarang and Salatiga, I met the Catholic priest on horseback. In answer to my question, he told me he had been to Salatiga to assist a dying soldier; I do not believe that a Protestant clergyman would have done the same, or, if he did so, it would be as an exception, and an act of self-sacrifice. Moreover, in the Catholic priest I noticed the *priestly* and *authoritative character*, whereas I saw in the clergyman nothing more than in an ordinary man. I relate only what I myself, and many others besides me (for I never heard any other opinion upon this subject in India), have accidentally experienced. I do not intend, of course, to blame the Protestant clergy, amongst whom undoubtedly are excellent and zealous men, — but at that time I *already* saw, even without inquiry, what was explained

to me by Lacordaire's Sermons—that the Catholic Church alone possesses the plenitude of Christian charity, because she alone possesses the *plenitude* of Christian faith.

I did not, however, value my experience in this way very highly, and I never regarded the Catholic Church as the true Church of Christ. If I now and then, from curiosity, attended the Catholic service, the question always occurred to me: how was it possible that reasonable men could be content with such a strange performance? and I rejoiced that Protestantism had put aside all those absurdities. I could not endure the images of the saints and the ornamentation of the altar. In a word, all that I saw and heard shocked me, and if any one had foretold that one day *I* should kneel down before that altar and touch my forehead with that holy water, I should have laughed heartily. Before, if I defended Christianity against the attacks of a friend (the author of the above-cited letter, who, by preference, took his arguments from Voltaire's "*Dictionnaire Philosophique*"), I always began by saying that I only

intervened for Protestantism, but did not interfere with the Voltarian scoffs against Catholic bigotry.

Now, however, whilst I was reading Lacordaire's *Conférences*, Catholic truth appeared to me in a clear and bright light, such as I never experienced before. I perceived at once that I had not understood it formerly at all, and that the variegated shell concealed a precious substance. I understood, as if by inspiration, that to become a Christian, I wanted to be a Catholic. Never before did I see the truth shine with such brilliancy; never did I feel so much of its warmth in my heart. Hence, I concluded that all that shocked me in the Catholic worship would disappear, in proportion to my growing acquaintance with the Catholic doctrine; that all those peculiar forms had a sublime signification for those who could understand and penetrate them. I perceived now, that the *great question* was quite different to what I had fancied; that by pursuing my inquiry, I should be very likely obliged to answer that question in a Catholic sense, and that what was as yet dark to me would become clear. Lacordaire was, in my present opinion, no philosopher, and

I do not believe that his *Conférences* would bring back to Rome many Protestant theologians. Sometimes there can be much said against his arguments, and it is evident that he has written only for a Catholic and French public. I would, therefore, never recommend his work, in the first instance, to a Protestant who desired to become acquainted with Catholicism. It is certain, however, that *I* owe him the greatest thanks. He pointed out to me the way, which I pursued many years later, under the direction of others. To me he was a messenger from God, the herald of that great benefit I was to obtain afterwards. With regard to me, his wish at the end of the Preface of his *Conférences* is fulfilled: "*Mes paroles arriveront au lecteur froides et décolorées; mais quand, au soir de l'automne, les feuilles tombent et gisent par terre, plus d'un regard et plus d'une main les cherchent encore, et, fussent elles dédaignées de tous, le vent peut les emporter et préparer une couche à quelque pauvre dont la Providence se souvient au haut du ciel.*" *I* was that poor man, who, at last, came to understand his poverty. For whilst my former religious meditations had had no other effect than to

inspire me with greater esteem for Christianity, as something external to myself, and only illuminated my understanding, whilst my heart remained unmoved, now I was pressed down by the burden of my sins, and looked with aversion upon my past life. I longed for reconciliation with God, and I thought myself ready to break every band which connected me with the evil. No sacrifice seemed too heavy to me, no satisfaction too severe. As a new man I should begin a new life of spotless purity and holiness. The Church wanted saints—as I was told by Lacordaire—now *I* should be one of them. I was so insane as to think it easy, from a slave of the devil, to become a child of God, and obtain the crown of victory without a struggle; to fancy myself cured, whilst I was covered with inveterated wounds, only because I shivered at the sight of those wounds; to expect my corrupted heart to be renewed, and my evil-inclined will converted at once, and to propose to myself that God should work on my behalf *the greatest and most singular wonder* of His Omnipotence, the sudden sanctification of a deeply-fallen sinner! At that

time I did not know as yet the immense extent of such a miracle. Experience had to teach me this, and at the same time the truth of that plain doctrine, in which consists the controversy between Catholicism and Protestantism, namely, that a Christian is not made in one day; but I wanted to be a Christian in a day, and by preference a Catholic and a *priest*. You laugh, reader, and not without reason, but did I not say that even your well-merited mockery should not prevent me from being as upright as possible in this history? I went to the Catholic priest to disclose my resolution, but I did not find him at home—and never afterwards did I call again, nor did I speak a single word to him about my intention.

I cannot however mention Father Van der Grinten's * name without a word of love and thanks. Much am I indebted to thee, faithful servant of thy Lord, although thou wast ignorant of it in this world. Now thou knowest it, now thou prayest for me, as I do each day for thee, as one of my dearest friends. In thy humility thou didst not know that thou wast

* The Rev. Father Van der Grinten was at the time about which the author is writing parish priest at Batavia.

for me, and for many others, a living image of our Lord Jesus Christ, by that immense love which was the principal feature of thy character. Thy love embraced all, but above all the poor, the little, and despised of the world. Thou wast the consoler of the sick and of the imprisoned, the friend of soldiers, the benefactor of the poor, the refuge of sinners. All this was natural to thee, and in thy works thou wast so free from consciousness of self-sacrifice, that undoubtedly thou wilt belong to those just who in the day of judgment will ask the Lord: "When did we see thee hungry, and fed thee; thirsty, and gave thee to drink? When did we see thee a stranger, and took thee in; or naked, and clothed thee? Or when did we see thee sick, and in prison, and visited thee?" —Matt. xxv. 37. But then hundreds of witnesses will rise up to give the answer. Then I also will relate how once thou didst come breathless to me to pay debts of a considerable amount for a man whom I, by order of one of my clients, had put into prison; and how thou didst refuse my well-meant advice not to do so, because that man was unworthy of thy charity, saying these sublime words: "Do you think,

then, that we should only help good people?" Then all those poor soldiers, whom I saw weeping around upon the occasion of the inauguration of thy monument, will raise their voices, and *all* who knew thee, Protestants and Catholics, Jews and Mahometans, will join in this testimony: "Yea, Lord, Thou hast judged well; he was Thy most faithful follower on earth, he ought to be one of Thy most favoured in heaven." I met him for the last time upon the occasion of my departure for the Netherlands, 1862, when he was accompanying one of his colleagues to the place for embarking at Batavia. Knowing that he had wished for a long time to see his country and his friends once more, I inquired at what time he thought of starting. "Not just yet," he answered, "because, to tell you the truth, I am over head and ears in debt." "In debt?" I asked with surprise. "Yes, in debt, somebody bequeathed me a legacy which I used to buy a new organ for the Church, which was greatly required. Unfortunately it cost twice as much as I expected, and so I must pay this first, before I can think of going back to Holland." I finished this short conversation by saying: "Look

here, Father, you will very likely never go to Holland, but certainly to heaven." When I arrived at Suez, on my return to India in 1864, the first news I heard from one of my countrymen who was returning home was, "All Batavia is in mourning, Father Van der Grinten is dead." That day of mourning for Batavia was a festival for the angels and saints of heaven.

I did not go back to that priest . . . because the impression of Lacordaire's Sermons had already begun to pass away, and because I asked myself, not without reason, whether I had been sufficiently on my guard against rashness, and whether I had not better inquire beforehand more exactly into the religious controversies, and keep my independent position at least until then. Moreover, my objections against the Catholic worship revived, and I resolved to wait. I borrowed of a friend of mine, the remaining volumes of the *Conférences*, and also a more poetical than edifying and philosophical work of Père Gratry on immortality, in which a journey through the star-heavens was proposed to the souls of the departed. Of these, and a few other books, which I do not

remember now, consisted at that time my Catholic literature. As my first perusal of Holy Scripture banished my aversion of Christianity, and inspired me with respectful admiration, so, in the same way, Lacordaire's Sermons had convinced me that the Catholic doctrine was the most sublime conception of Christianity, and that I was not justified in considering some points in Catholic worship as foolish or bigoted because I did not understand them. From that time I never went to a Catholic church without a reverential feeling, as if I fancied that I heard the words: "*Here* is your place also."

About this time I came, through a friend, into connection with a small number of devout Protestants, whom I joined a few times in prayer and reading the Bible. I cannot say that these meetings satisfied me very much, or brought me nearer to a resolution. The affectation of religion, and declamatory tone of some of them, were troublesome to me, although it did not prevent me from esteeming them highly. They were, as far as I can judge, true Christians outside the Church of Christ; but that *plenitude* of faith and love which showed

itself to me in Lacordaire's Sermons, I failed to find amongst them. Each of them followed—as I myself did at that time—his own interpretation of Holy Scripture. They were people seeking and asking—for which reason I understood very soon that they could not be my guides on the road of truth. I trust Almighty God will have directed them in this life, or hereafter, better than they were able to direct me.

Meantime, I had to struggle very hard against sin, and against bad habits into which I had relapsed. What a difference there was then between my behaviour, and the holiness which I imagined it so easy to obtain! How was I tossed about between good and evil, until the latter would be victorious again for a long time! The fact is, I did not return to my former wickedness at once; but it is true also that every good impression became more and more faint and passing; that my prayer was wanting in ardour and sincerity, and very soon was neglected entirely; that my thoughts were withdrawn by degrees from heavenly truth, and that I fell back again into the sins from which I had nearly released myself. In the middle of 1861 I resigned the

editorship of the "Batavian Handelsblad," and a short time afterwards my legal practice also. In the spring of the next year I started for the Netherlands. Nothing remarkable happened during my journey, save that in Egypt, where I remained for a few days, a voice seemed to call me to Jerusalem, but I did not go. Of what use would it have been to me, in my then state of mind? I should have looked at the holy places with the same unmoved respect with which I saw those at Rome a year afterwards. I went to my country, revisited my native town, and saw my family again; after which I travelled through Belgium, France, Italy, and Germany, but always and everywhere *without God.* What shall I relate, therefore, of that miserable period, in which I pursued pleasure and experienced disgust—in which I increased every moment the burden of my sins, and existed without living? Having said so much of *my* wickedness, I will hasten, O Lord, to speak of *Thy* mercy.

Every Christian will agree that this history has been until now nothing but the exposition of a

sinner's stubborn opposition to a continued *miracle* of God's mercy and patience. What trouble the Lord of heaven and earth takes to rescue the most unworthy from the ruin which they themselves seek and delight in! Is not the word of His Omnipotence sufficient? Is He—whose only word, LET THERE BE LIGHT, has driven away darkness from the *material* world—is He not able to enlighten in the same manner the darkened soul of one of His creatures? Certainly, Thou canst do it, O Lord! With only one word Thou didst save and sanctify the good thief on the cross, and Mary Magdalen; so Thou couldst have done with me also. But the ways of Thy grace are manifold, O Lord! And if I cannot penetrate the secrets of Thy wisdom, am I not allowed to guess that Thou wouldst add the example of my life to that of so many others, whose long obstinacy, *at last* overcome, proves that the conversion of the most obdurate sinner is never to be despaired of?

But, finally, what does it signify *how* grace is given to us? *Provided that* it be given, provided

that it *remains*, O Lord! Alas! so long have I missed, so greatly abused it. "Let me die in order never to die;" thus I now pray with St. Augustine, that I may never lose that grace again. I am weak, but Thou art Omnipotent; Lord, have mercy on me!

V.

My fruitless rambling led me, by God's providence, to an act which I had not in the least premeditated, namely, to a marriage. In a German family I met a lady whose gentle and loving appearance made so deep an impression on my mind, that I resolved if possible to win her. I succeeded, and as my intended had no fortune, and the money which I had saved in India was nearly spent, I agreed with her father to marry immediately after the betrothal, and to return to India, where we could obtain a livelihood at once more easily than in Europe. She herself had no objection to this plan, especially as I confidently assured her that after a few years she should see her parents and family again.

But of more importance to her than to me was our difference of religion. She was a Catholic, and had been educated in the convent at Nonnenwerth, near Rolandseck, of which she still retained the

most tender remembrance. It was inconsistent with the principles which she had there imbibed to confide to a Protestant husband the direction of her life, and perhaps that also of her children, as far as this can depend upon men. With reason the Church objects in principle to mixed marriages, although she does not forbid them on all occasions. She cannot but dislike what even common-sense disapproves, and what a believing Protestant also disapproves, although *he* considers it only a solemn contract, whereas *we* venerate it as a Holy Sacrament.

If the religious mind of my future wife had continued as it had been formed at Nonnenwerth, this objection would very likely never have been surmounted. But now, with God's permission, it yielded to her love for me, as I was ready to accept the conditions without which the dispensation, necessarily required for our ecclesiastical marriage, never would have been granted, namely, to promise that all our children should be brought up as Catholics. This condition can appear unfair to those only who forget that the Catholic Church believes herself to be the *only* one in possession of

the whole revealed truth and means of salvation. Many, perhaps, will regard my accepting these conditions as a new proof of indifference on my part. But this would be a false conclusion. I readily made this promise, because, in my then opinion, children in all cases ought to follow the religious convictions of the mother, from whom they must receive the first and deepest impressions; moreover, by reading Lacordaire's *Conférences*, my aversion to Catholicism had changed to a sincere, although imperfect and unfertile, inclination towards it. Instead of being shocked, I cherished the idea of my children being members of that Church whose doctrine and labours I regarded with respect, and whose forms and customs, however unintelligible and unacceptable to me, would become quite natural to them, when impressed upon them from their childhood.

On the 21st of January 1864 I was married in the Catholic Church at Baden-Baden. As soon as I had introduced my wife to the members of my family, we went, in the beginning of March, *via* Marseilles to Java.

Shortly after our arrival at Batavia, I resumed my legal practice, as well as the editorship of the "Batavian Handelsblad." At the end of 1864, I changed this position for the editorship of the "New Batavian Handelsblad," the charge of which I had until July 1867. During this time I had plenty of work, and cared not for any pleasure but what I found in a quiet and retired family life. The success of my undertakings, and our simple mode of living, made us confident that, in a few years, we should be able to return to Europe, to which my wife's inclination still attracted her; and in July 1866 the birth of a lovely daughter crowned the happiness of our marriage. What could I desire more?—*nothing* in the opinion of the world, *all* in the opinion of God. Certainly, since my marriage I had changed a great deal for the better. In many respects I had neither time nor occasion to do evil; those temptations to which I had formerly been exposed had apparently lost their power. Other grave transgressions, too, I found myself seldom guilty of. Sincere love of my wife made me a tolerably good husband, as far as this can be connected with the neglect of the

priestly character of the head of a Christian family. Although I never prevented my wife from discharging her religious duties, and even occasionally accompanied her to church, my example of indifference and ingratitude against God exercised, in the long run, a pernicious influence upon her disposition, which was gentle and loving, but needed a husband's support.

That support she could not receive from me, for I myself had not the strength to give it. To such an extent had I forgotten Almighty God, that I did not invoke Him at the birth of my child. I neither prayed to Him in the moment of danger, nor thanked Him after it had passed. On the occasion of the baptism, I experienced no other feeling than that of respectful interest. I thought not of the invaluable benefit then bestowed upon my child; but of *what* benefit of the Lord did I think?

Thou didst think of me, Lord Jesus, and all my obduracy and ingratitude could not extinguish the love with which Thou hast pursued me since the beginning of my life. As a father loves his child, notwithstanding its wickedness; as a mother has

compassion on the fruit of her womb, and loves it, even without return, with a love from which *nothing* can divert her, so Thy inexhaustible mercy has combated my coldness, in order that a beam of Thy ardent charity might at last penetrate into my heart. Thou hast conquered, O Lord, but alas! how late and insufficiently have I yielded to Thy love! Manifest unto me Thy power, that I may bow down, die with sorrow for my sins, and be consumed by a thousandth part of *Thy* love. Now, O Lord, now even, how feebly do I love Thee! Permit it no longer, O Almighty God, but let Thy will be done upon earth as it is in heaven. Am *I* allowed to ask the reward of Saints? Do, Lord, what is good in Thy sight, and save me from ruin! The last place is good enough for me.

I have now arrived at the great turning-point of my life. At this time I was what is ordinarily called a good man; I gave no scandal, committed no extraordinary sin, and performed as much good as was expected of my natural kind-heartedness.

In every man the history of mankind is repeated:

—each one of us loses paradise through his own fault, but may by God's grace gain heaven if he will. Not only did Adam's sin become through God's merciful justice the *felix culpa*, about which the Church sings her hymn, but the personal sin of each one of his descendants, provided that he be converted and sin no more, becomes a "happy offence." Sin together with repentance makes a man a Christian.* For the sick the Heavenly Physician came into the world, not for the healthy, since the healthy are not in such urgent need of Him. *Poor* is the child that wants no mother, so also *poor* is the man who needs no Redeemer! Shall we therefore make this an excuse to ourselves to sin again? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Yes, says Luther in his notorious letter to Melanchthon,† but St. Paul

* It would be incorrect to assert that "sin together with repentance makes a man a Christian," as if one could not be a Christian without sinning. To speak accurately, a man becomes a Christian by Baptism. The author no doubt means, that sins which have been forgiven are often a great incentive to zeal in the service of God.

† "Be a sinner and sin strongly, but believe more strongly, and rejoice in Christ, who is the conqueror of sin, of death, and of the world. We must sin, as long as we are here upon earth. This

answers: "God forbid! for how shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

The first good effect, then, which arose from my evil deed was a great confidence in the efficacy of prayer, which, in spite of all my offences and errors of later date, I never again lost. On the contrary, I became more and more convinced of the *exact* truth of the wonderful promise: "*Whatsoever* you shall ask of the Father in My name He will give it you" (St. John xv. 16). It depends only upon the *manner* in which you pray, and this again does not depend upon a man's will only. The most devout Christian experiences occasional tepidity which prevents him from lifting up his heart to God, because a heavy burden weighs upon his soul, and binds him down to earth. In those sorrowful days even the prayer of the virtuous

life is not a habitation of justice, but we look, says Peter, forward to new heavens and a new earth, where Justice dwells. It is enough that through the riches of God's glory we know the Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world; sin shall not separate us from Him, even though we committed on one day a thousand sins of lust and murder."

To such a depth of foolishness genius falls if it presumes to change the doctrine of the Church of Christ for its own.

fails in fervour and power,* and he can hardly pray for anything else except that God may not leave him any longer in desolation. The trials of the saints in this respect are described in many chapters of the "Imitation of Jesus Christ," and what is for them an exception, is for the greater part of Christians an ordinary state of mind. How very seldom we—less privileged as we are—how very seldom are we allowed to feel that intimate communion with God, to speak with Him as if sensibly in His presence, as a child speaks to his father, thoroughly opening our hearts, and free from all wandering thoughts! It is certain, however, that he who prays each day *as well as he can*, will obtain sooner or later the grace of such a fervent prayer.

Now this prayer must of *necessity* be heard. Not only has Christ assured us of this in the most solemn words, which do not admit of any limitation, or of any exception whatever, but we know it from experi-

* It may be added here, that prayer persevered in, in spite of dryness, is most acceptable to God, and therefore as efficacious as prayer performed with that fervour of soul of which the author speaks a few lines further on.

ence. I for myself avow that I cannot remember that God ever despised my prayer, if it really deserved to be called by that name. Whenever I have humbly, confidently, and fervently asked His help, He *has* granted it. Whoever, therefore, may consider His unlimited hearing of prayer as exaggerated, I at least cannot do so with truth. But, alas! how often did I pray without sincerity, with my lips and not with my heart, or even with a secret fear of being heard! Who but God is able to scrutinise *every* hiding-place of evil in a soul which has been sullied by sin for a long time?

VI.

HEREIN consisted the first benefit Almighty God bestowed upon me, besides that for which I had petitioned. But a far greater benefit was to be the consequence of it. I prayed confidently that God would manifest unto me His truth, and enlighten me in a new and decisive inquiry into the Christian doctrine. This was to me intimately connected with the question, whether Catholics or Protestants had preserved that doctrine incorrupt?

In my opinion, *every* Protestant ought to put this question to himself as a matter of course, for, in order to protest, it is necessary to know against what one is protesting. If the Reformation was right in its principle of rejecting authoritative faith, it follows that it is nonsense to accept the authority of this or that Protestant minister, instead of that of the Catholic Church. As opposed to the fact that his clergyman accuses that Church of corruption and bigotry, the

other fact which a Protestant has to weigh is, that many millions of his fellow-Christians preserved her doctrine, and followed her precepts submissively. Now, in order to discover upon which side error is, common-sense requires us to hear not only one, but both parties, and each one in its own language, not in that of its adversary. As soon, indeed, as I admit an authority in any one which is a sufficient guarantee for accepting his words, I may consider myself as discharged from the obligation of giving the opponents a hearing. For this reason, a Catholic who entirely confides in the infallibility of the Church is no more obliged to inquire into the truth of her decisions than he is into the truth of those of our Lord and His Apostles, whose teaching authority, in *his* opinion, has been entirely transmitted to her. A Protestant, however, acknowledges no other infallible teacher save Christ and His Apostles, and is bound to collect *their* doctrine from a book, the contents of which, being written in different foreign languages, are often very difficult to understand, or—as an undeniable experience tells us—capable of different interpretations. Now, which interpretation is the true one?

Are we justified in accepting simply that which is put before us by any instructor whom we come across by chance? Certainly not, for by so doing we should, without any reasonable grounds, subject ourselves to a much more despotic authority in matters of faith than that which Catholics are blamed for obeying, and for which they allege reasons, from their point of view at least, quite sufficient. Moreover, this difference of interpretation is not confined to mere trifles, but extends to the principal tenets of Christianity.

In the first place, the question arises whether Christ is really the Son of God, one with the Father. Upon the questions of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, one clergyman is of one opinion, another clergyman is of another, and the opinion of both is opposed to the Catholic doctrine. If you feel obliged—and as a Protestant you *are* constrained to do so—to choose between the interpretation of a Lutheran or of a Calvinist, between that of an orthodox or a modern clergyman (after having thoroughly examined the arguments of *both* parties), you are bound, for the same reason, to extend your

inquiry to the doctrine of the Catholic Church. Would you reject only on the authority of others, and condemn even without hearing, that Church which your forefathers venerated as Christ's Spouse, and the only true Church, during the course of fifteen centuries? On the contrary, according to your own principles of personal and independent inquiry (which, however difficult to the greater part of men, is nevertheless necessary to *your* doctrine), you are obliged to hear the Catholic Church *herself*, either from writings which she has approved, or from the mouth of her priests. Of her priests! What a commotion I see arising up against you, sacred servers of the Lord; a commotion of scoffing and calumny, contempt and hatred, envy and abuse, in which the devil delights, but over which the angels of God lament. I know with what tranquillity of soul you endure that commotion, how deeply you are penetrated with that divine word: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke xxiii. 34); and how ardently you seek out every excuse which argues the good faith of your assailants. I know also with what perseverance you

pray for them, bless them, and do them good. Not without fruit did you receive the Holy Sacrament of Ordination; it gave you strength to rejoice in the contempt which you have to share with your Master. For they hate you as bitterly as they hated Him, and hereby you justly recognise yourselves to be His disciples. But *we*, who love and respect you because we know you, because we each day witness your lives of sacrifice and devotion, because we know with how much heroic courage over yourselves, and with how much love of poor sinners, your hearts are filled—*we* resent the pain which cannot move you; our blood boils in our veins on account of the calumny which does not disturb your calm. And we, children of the Church, answer that calumny by giving witness of you that you are the followers of the Apostle's precept: "Giving no offence to any one, that our ministry be not blamed: but in all things let us exhibit ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in tribulation, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in prisons, in seditions, in labours, in watchings, in chastity, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in sweetness, in the Holy Ghost, in charity un-

feigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God, by the armour of justice on the right hand and on the left, through honour and dishonour, through evil report and good report: *as seducers, and yet speaking truth;* as unknown, and yet known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastised, and not killed; as sorrowful, and yet always rejoicing; as needy, yet enriching many; as having nothing, yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. vi. 3-10.) And nothing in the world can rob you of this justly-deserved praise, not even the infirmities which are in you by reason of your human nature, not even the unworthy few who here or there wear the priestly vestments. Could St. Peter's fall or Judas' treason dishonour the apostles?

I did not fear those whom St. Paul says are called "seducers," but I did not consult them. My first duty, in order to fulfil the task which I had set myself to do, was the attentive perusal of Holy Scripture, from the beginning of Genesis until the last verse of the Apocalypse, as far as the States' Bible* contains it.

* The Bible edited by the States of Holland.

By these means I became a thoroughly-believing Christian, and, moreover, I acquired this double conviction, that the Reformation rejected some of the most important dogmas, and that the greater part of objections against Catholicism possessed the same force against Christianity. The principal causes which produced this effect of my reading Holy Scripture I will shortly and clearly enumerate. I do not intend, however, to write here an apology for the Catholic faith, but a sincere explanation of the current of thought by which, with the grace of God, I became a Catholic.

In doing so, I have to put forward a principle, which, in my opinion, is most important in investigating the truth, and without which I never should have arrived at an exact decision, namely: *that points of minor importance never should draw our attention from the principal question.* I was greatly convinced of the importance of this principle by reason of my legal practice. Almost every cause admits of arguments on both sides, and this to a certain extent without bad faith. Very seldom the right of one party

is so clearly and thoroughly established, that there are no objections and arguments to be brought forward by opponents. When a layman listens to the plea of two advocates of talent, he will always feel what Henry IV. felt, who, in such a case cried out: "*ils ont ma foi tous deux raison.*" But those advocates themselves, or, at least, their impartial colleagues and the judges, generally know very well which of the two defends the true cause, and which tries to blindfold justice. For they examine the "*cardo questionis*," the *decisive point* of the question, and always look at it, so that all arguments not to the point, however shrewd and acceptable they may be, exercise no influence over their verdict. If it were otherwise, the sentence of a judge would only by chance be a *judicial sentence*.

This principle which I had set up, I always acted up to in my inquiry into divine truth. "*Si la religion*," says very shrewdly, A. Nicolas, in his "*Études philosophiques sur le Christianisme*"—"*a toujours des obscurités aui servent de prétexte, elle a*

toujours des clartés qui ôtent tout excuse. Elle a des preuves invincibles, auxquelles on ne peut résister sans déraison, et d'où on peut toujours partir pour incliner à une soumission raisonnable, et qui ira toujours se motivant de plus en plus." To act in this way in these matters is the more essential, because faith would cease to be an act of free will, as well as a *virtue*, if a reasonable man, in spite of himself, were *compelled* to believe, and there remained no pretext to excuse his unbelief, and to cavil against God. It has always seemed to me as if God for the trial of Christian faith, has designedly left opportunities to the devil of raising objections, which is his joy and pleasure. I have often intended to write an apology for Christianity with the title, "*L'essentiel et le part du diable*," of which this idea would have been the basis. Not that divine truth, revealed in Holy Scripture and by the Church, besides its fundamental contents, can contain errors to mislead men; but because many secondary matters *may* or *do* become false lights for all those who prefer to shut their eyes to the sunlight of the main question. I,

for my part, sought in Christianity and Catholicism the sunlight, and as often as false lights were lit up by *its* splendour, they became to me as brilliant stars on the firmament of faith. Some examples of which I will afterwards relate.

VII.

WHAT, then, is to me the *principal question* in the great plea between Christianity and unbelief? It is this: *whether Christ came into the world to save sinners?* A negative answer to this question robs Christianity of all its value, and of the very purpose of its existence. Was Christ really no more than the preacher of a sublime morality, no more than an extraordinarily pure and noble man, who preached to us the beautiful and the good in its sublimest conception, and left us a glorious example to imitate, but who possessed not the power to redeem us from the slavery and punishment of sin? If so, it would be idolatry to constitute Him the centre of our worship of God; and the Christian faith would be from the first to the last a *lie*, the influence of which would humiliate mankind, and avert it from the true knowledge of God. Again, in that case, the New Testament is a tissue of fables and tasteless inventions, in

which Christ is mocked and ridiculed in the most unbecoming manner; in which the beautiful figure of the wise man of Nazareth is disfigured into a frightful and fantastic caricature, and distorted and spoiled in all its features. Then the gold of moral truth ought most carefully to be washed from the dross of invention, in which it had been buried by doltish ignorance, or evil dispositions of His disciples. Then Voltaire's saying, *écrasez l'infâme* is *entirely* justified—if not with regard to Christ as the holy man Himself, at least with regard to Christ as the false Saviour who is set up as an object of adoration. The consequence of this, certainly, would be, that the existence of this eminent moralist brought upon mankind an incalculable evil, by for ever ensnaring it in a net of lies and bigotry. But is the Son of Mary truly THE REDEEMER OF SINFUL MANKIND? Did He come not merely to convert sinners, but, above all, to SAVE them? Then He *must* have been of necessity the Son of God.

The first, indeed, it would be possible for any one to do; but the second is only within the power of Him who, in all things, has been made equal to

God. The loving words of Christ, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," spoken over every repenting sinner, would be a horrible blasphemy in the mouth of a mere man, who, as Christ did, spoke on *His own personal authority*. Could there be a greater folly than that of a man setting himself up by his own authority on the tribunal of God? And is it possible to imagine a more convincing proof of Divine power than that which is contained in Christ's words to His Apostles, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained"? (St. John xx. 22, 23).

In that case, Christianity becomes to us a question of the highest importance. What matters it to me whether there existed an eminent man whose name was Jesus? What matters it to me whether even God Himself came down upon earth, if He intended nothing more than the perfect representation of a *morale en action*, the precepts of which I *can* find in my own conscience? I knew very well the generosity existing in repaying evil with good, or either Epictetus or Socrates could have taught me this.

Did this God intend to drive me to despair by placing His unattainable holiness in opposition to my misery?

No; He came to clothe *Himself* with my misery, and to make me a *partaker* of His holiness. Being Himself without sin, He came to carry the burden of *my* sins, and to redeem me by *His* sufferings from its consequences. He came to convert me, from being a slave to the devil, into a child of God, provided only that I permitted it. He came to urge me by His unutterable love to reciprocal love, that is to say, to salvation,—for there is no other safety, except in the love of God; and all who possess this *are* saved.

Is the curse of sin which has fallen on man, is the taking away of that curse, a dream or a reality to a Christian? This is the essential question, the answer to which must render Christianity to each one of us *either* a most insoluble riddle, *or* the most certain of all truth.

The curse of sin—a dream! Find that out from the annals of bloodshed and the endless list of wars, and then try, if you can, to excuse mankind from incur-

able insanity, and *not* admit the existence of that curse! Consult for the same purpose the traditions of all nations, and hear how from every corner of the earth the same answer is given unto you—an answer telling you that the guilt of man banished him from the paradise which he once possessed! But *above all*, seek into your own heart, and when you find, as *you do*, that heart filled with bad passions—with envy and anger, with covetousness and falsehood, with vanity and criminal lusts, with dreadful egotism, which shuns the least trouble to yourself, much more than the greatest injury to a neighbour, with uneasiness and dissatisfaction which never allow rest in the present, but are always vainly promising a future relief; if you find all this, as you do—then, if you think the curse of sin a dream, you must maintain that Almighty God, having created man in such a state, made him the most miserable of all His creatures. For you are no unfortunate exception, *every* natural man resembles you, the *inclination* to evil exists in each one of us since the first man wilfully subjected himself to sin, except that it does not *enslave* us all in the same degree. Without God's supernatural grace, man can to a certain extent com-

bat sin, and he is not a slave of it to such an extent that he is obliged to indulge in all his bad inclinations. If *this* were not true, the whole world would soon be a slaughterhouse, and all mankind in a short time annihilated. Whosoever denies this, sets himself up against the unanimous testimony of *all* who are renowned on account of their deep knowledge of men, and, moreover—if he knows himself—speaks against his own testimony.

It is, however, impossible that God should have created men, such as they are, unless, as some thoughtless people have done, you admit an evil spirit to have been His creator. In that case, of course, we were from our creation condemned to eternal wretchedness. But we know better; we feel we are no *children* of Satan, although we are his slaves. He always allures us and seduces us, but nobody believes himself to be led *by him* on the road of his true destination. If we obey him, we do so with conscious violation of our own true nature, or else we imagine the evil spirit of darkness to be an angel of light. We do not seek our origin from the devil, but from a good and merciful God, whose name is proclaimed by all

creatures. And can *this* Creator have made the inclination to evil the prevailing one in our heart? No; that predominant disposition *can* have *no other* cause than our abused liberty. It was not in man when God created him. It was the fruit of his own free will, which God bestowed upon him as the highest prerogative of his reason, but which, seduced by Satan, he employed to his ruin. It was the necessary consequence of the first and most guilty disobedience, by which man in his first parent revolted against God. In consequence of that act, and from the time of it, man wears the livery of the devil, the veil thrown around his original beauty.

Since that act of sin, paradise has been changed into a vale of tears, in which guilty man has to fight a fierce and continual battle against innumerable calamities and evils; in which he cannot for a moment forget his misery without forgetting even the difference which distinguishes him from the animals; in which his deepest thought is his bitterest suffering, and his finest feeling the most grievous possible pain; in which he has to change at last a tormented existence for a frightful death, in order to be *either* annihilated, *or* to

appear with a heavily-laden conscience before the most holy Judge, who proved to him in this world how He could punish, but not how He could pity. As truly as God exists, *the curse of sin is no dream!* But the rescuing, too, from that curse is no dream to a Christian. Those words which without folly no *man* could speak, are really true: "Come to me all you that labour and are heavily laden, and I will refresh you" (Matt. xi. 28). Truly the Lord Jesus, and He only, gives rest. He only empowers poor man to bless God's punishing hand, to pray in entire subjection: "Not my will, but Thine be done;" to find in that very subjection a blessing in which all worldly misery is annihilated; to bear *all things*, even the unconquerable weakness of our fallen nature, even the continual temptations of the devil, even the sinful inclination of his own heart, and all that without despair, in full belief of a *certain* victory after a persevering struggle. Christ alone teaches us to despise the world and its master, to reject its imaginary happiness and false consolation, and, instead of striving after the pleasure of this world, which passes so quickly, and is spoiled by so much fear and care,

to seek the unchangeable joy of heaven. If man's fatherland is corrupted through his own fault, Christ will give him a new and infinitely more glorious one in its place. We are exiles and disinherited children here, but only for a short time. What signify the sufferings of a few years in comparison with eternal happiness? Can present misery hurt us, now that we know for certain that it will cease to-morrow, and never return? As the cry of joy of momentary happiness is a discordance in the grief of fallen mankind, a discordance, too, in every one's personal existence, which *undoubtedly*, and *soon*, will be changed for the agreement in the general cry of distress; so too the cry of grief of the earth, and of his own heart, is to every Christian a quickly passing discordance in the joyful cry of heaven, in which he hopes soon, and for ever, to participate.

Words, senseless words! exclaims the infidel. *Most certain of all truths!* replies the Christian, for there is no other truth which he feels so thoroughly. A more convincing and more ardent conviction cannot be shown than that of St. Paul, of St. Augustine, of the author of the "Imitation of Christ,"

and of thousands and ten thousands of true Christians through all centuries. Infidelity has never been tested and sealed as Christian faith has been. Never was there a work more strongly opposed than that of Christ. In vain the devil spends his infernal deceit; in vain he stirs up the courage of his followers by pretended victories; in vain he unfurls the banner of enlightenment and progress against Christianity; in vain he tries by means of false science to take away its value—the work of Christ, the salvation of sinners, remains ever unchanged.

Every sinner who does not shut his eyes to the fact that his heart is inclined to evil, and has revolted against God; *every one* who possesses sufficient intellectual powers to know his misery, whether he is disgusted with pleasure or bent down by cares of this life; *every one* who is fatigued, and *every one* who is burdened, can *every* day, and *every* moment, find rest in Christ, and millions of men *do find* that rest in Him every day. I know there are many who are Christians in name only, but I know also that the number of true Christians is not so small as infidelity reports. I must allow that you must

not always expect from Christians that perfection, which Christ proposed to them, but did not promise as at once attainable. In order to be saved from the slavery of Satan, it is enough to struggle against him under the guidance of the Saviour of souls. Not holiness itself, but *to seek* earnestly after holiness, is required for salvation. That earnestly seeking alone is sufficient to raise man from the earth, and to gain for him that supernatural peace, by virtue of which he learns to bear the grief which formerly was insupportable, yea, even *to love* it. A Christian suffers like others, but he submits himself to suffering willingly, because he knows it is good for him, and appointed by a merciful Father; and as often as God grants him the grace of His peculiar consolations, he rejoices in his sufferings, because these make him resemble his Master, and render him more ripe for heaven. For a Christian, life has lost its despair, and death its terrors; *the Christian is indeed free from the curse of sin.*

Because I looked with an humble and truth-loving heart down into the abyss of my misery and that of God's mercy, I became a believing Chris-

tian; all my doubts were dispersed by the irresistible power "of the word of eternal life." I grant, however, that this power does not *become* irresistible until God gives grace, and that it cannot be forced upon the mind by reasoning, or demonstrated as a mathematical proposition. A Christian cannot *possibly* but see the light which the infidel does not perceive. The spiritual blindness of the latter will be cured, we are certain, when he fervently and perseveringly prays for cure, but it is precisely for such a prayer that the consciousness of his blindness is necessarily required, and this cannot be obtained by reason alone. The essence of Christian faith is, and according to its nature *must* be, above human argumentation; to understand it, one must *practise* it, and he who practises it can only feebly describe the impression of the heavenly truth which fills his heart. "A man as full of the Holy Ghost as St. Paul," says a French writer, "could not do more on this point than to stammer, but stammering in the language of divine eloquence is a manner of speech, in comparison with which the most fervent eloquence of this world seems to be cold and powerless."

None therefore can be *compelled* by reason to become Christians. If the infidel, however, be an earnest man, Christianity must become a new and continuous trial of his life. For he sees himself placed here before a most remarkable phenomenon, the nature of which he will always be trying in vain, even in some degree, to understand. Was Christ truly the Son of God? then of course His words must be absolutely believed, and then also it must be unintelligible to him why *he*, the earnest investigator of truth, cannot obtain that belief. If Christ was not the Son of God, *who* then was He? An *idea*, a *legend*, perhaps? Poor "scholars!" who labour hard to raise an artistic building, which at the first breath of common-sense will be overturned, and to speak to the world a wisdom which cannot remain firm against one page of the Gospel. Add freely argument to argument, be fully surprised at the acuteness and depth of your own intellect, admire the light of the nineteenth century, in opposition to the ignorance of all past ages, analyse at your will Holy Scripture in an allegory, and the historical Christ in a secondary idea,—after all your labours you will not have advanced a single step;

the deep conviction of mankind, that of every man, and *your own* conviction also, will *always* exclaim: "*And yet He existed!*" He existed, and no personality in the history of the world stands out so *prominently* before us as His!

Was He then a deceiver from ambition? But His life was a life of poverty and humiliation; the death which He willingly chose was a death of the greatest shame. Did He, perhaps, suffer then from a desire to be renowned among posterity? But *to be able* to foresee that the general outrage and hatred under which He quitted this life, that the state of almost entire abandonment on His cross, and the desertion of even those *few* disciples whom He had gained during His life, would change for the adoration of mankind *after* His ignominious death—I say, to be able to foresee all this requires the gift of a prophet, which God does not grant to a blasphemer. Christ therefore was no wilful deceiver, but perhaps He was an insane fanatic? For let us call things by their proper names, and not speak with Renan's loathsome politeness, of "*un aimable jeune homme*," where there is question of the insane blindness of a man who,

conjured by the high priest to say whether He was the Christ the Son of God, dared to answer: "Thou hast said it." Truly, if He *had been* only a man, the high priest was right in rending his garments and in exclaiming indignantly: "He hath blasphemed: what further need have we of witnesses? What think you?" And then the people too were right in saying: "He is guilty of death!" Whilst only some compassionate wise man could have proposed to change the pain of death into . . . . my hand trembles to write the word down, and *you* infidel tremble to read it . . . . into imprisonment in an asylum. Choose between a blasphemer and a madman, or ask pardon for *your own* blasphemy and *your own* foolishness, and fall down upon your knees before God! O Lord Jesus, my Lord and my God! pardon me that I have dared write in this manner in the sight of Thy Majesty; let my hand wither if it has sinned: but how shall I *force* Thy enemies to admit Thy divinity except by the invincible dread which makes them hesitate to speak out plainly what Thou *wast*, if Thou wast not the Son of God. Cowardly hypocrisy cannot possibly find here a

pretext . . . . or a remnant of the fear of God must be left, which for many gone astray may be the germ of their regeneration. Let them not cease to ask themselves: "*Who was this Jesus?*" as it is becoming for a man who wishes to be more than a brute. Let them not rest until they have given themselves a sufficient answer to this question, by which both their understanding and their heart are satisfied, and let them speak then as rational beings. If they *can* and *dare* do this, without an invisible hand striking them in the face, then their answer will be: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!"

Do you *desire* the truth? This is the important question which I put before every infidel among my readers. Do you anxiously wish it as I did? Well, then, you *will* find it as I did. Almighty God hides Himself from those only who hide themselves from Him. If you with sound sense look for arguments in behalf of Christianity, they are innumerable and incontestable, and exclude all reasonable doubt. They are infinitely more powerful than the arguments of any other truth whatsoever; so powerful, indeed, that, if after a fundamental

inquiry you reject *these* arguments, your understanding at the same time has become incapable of *any* conviction. To collect these arguments in a few words or pages would be impossible, but I will show you a book, in which you can find them explained clearly and fully. I mean the above-cited work of M. A. Nicolas: "*Études philosophiques, sur le Christianisme*" (4 *vols. Paris, A. Vaton, dix-septième édit.* 1865). I owe particular thanks to the work of this French Justice of Peace; it has become my constant companion, which I do not cease to read again and again, and which always furnishes me true arguments against every attack of unbelief. Try, but in good faith, to refute that book; oppose the author, provided that you are sincerely resolved to admit it as often as you are wrong; make your plea, but do so as an *honest* advocate who abhors the use of *chicanery* against that champion of Christianity, and then place yourself as a judge between yourself and him. You may then find out, perhaps, that you have prevailed over him on certain points, and that you possess on certain subjects a more acute intellect and more learning; you may consider some of his arguments

insufficient, and some of your difficulties not solved; you may still remark twilight in this or that corner which he fancies to be sufficiently enlightened; but when, with the conscientiousness of a judge, you are about to decide upon the plea between Christianity and infidelity, undoubtedly M. Nicolas will be the gainer for the plaintiff, Christ. The insufficiency in defending secondary things will not be able to do any harm to the perfectly evident proof of the principal question.

Indeed, you will be then convinced of the truth of Christianity, which can be proved *most evidently* to every man in good faith; and what else then remains for you to do, but most fervently to pray for *that* conviction which *cannot* be obtained by arguments, to pray for that lively and saving faith by which the newly-discovered truth will penetrate not only your intellect but your heart also, and point out to you a place among the children of God.

This is the course which I advise you to adopt, if you desire to know the truth, and through that knowledge to become a Christian. At the time about which I am now writing, I had not as yet read

the work of M. Nicolas; I preferred to receive the first impression exclusively from Holy Scripture, by the aid of which I had been formerly induced to admit the divinity of Christ, and which was also sufficient, at this time, to free my conviction of the fundamental truth of Christianity, from every doubt. The only difference between the present and the past existed in the application of the discovered truth to myself; the Christ of the human race became at last *my* Christ too; the cold admiration of former days changed for the question: Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?

VIII.

At the period of which I was speaking in the last chapter, I remarked that Protestantism had thrown aside as useless ballast some of our Lord's most touching doctrines. First I was shocked at the way in which Protestants ignore the words of St. John xx. 22, 23, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained," with which agree the words of St. Matthew xviii. 18, "Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven."

The power of forgiving sins, which Christ (see St. Matthew ix. 6) had assumed, and often exercised, could not have been transferred to the apostles, more positively and clearly than was here done. Is it not entirely arbitrary to admit that *this* part only of diivne authority was given to the apostles, and *not*

transferred to their legally-appointed successors, whilst no such exception is made in the Sacred Scriptures? By what authority were the words of St. Matthew xxviii. 18–20, "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," by what authority, I say, were these words to be extended to the same successors? That this extension was intended by Christ is evident from the words immediately following: "And behold I am with you all days, *even to the consummation of the world.*" Moreover, it appears from the very nature of the thing, because the short life of the apostles would be by no means sufficient to teach and baptize *all nations.* This appears also from those scriptural passages which relate expressly the transfer of the apostolic vocation to others (see, for instance, Acts xiii. 2, 3; xx. 28: 2 Tim. i. 6; ii. 2). Truly there is no Christian who contests the transfer to others of the apostolic authority to baptize in their Master's name. How

is it possible, then, to deny this with regard to the power of retaining or remitting sins, since this power is conferred upon them in the same manner? And how is such a denial consistent with the *eternal* and *immutable* character of our Lord's promises, when the power of forgiving sins would thus have existed in the Church for a very short time only, during the few years of the life of the apostles, and only in behalf of those few men who came in contact with them? Is there any conceivable reason why Christ should have so singularly privileged *some* men, who lived in the first century of our era, above all others, as to give to them alone the opportunity of obtaining, after a true repentance, forgiveness of their sins by power of the apostolic words? And yet this absurdity a Protestant only can avoid by admitting another, namely: that the apostolic forgiveness of sins was merely a superfluous show, that the words of Christ, so emphatically spoken, had no real meaning, and that this gift, which He announced as the highest power of the Holy Ghost, had no significance.

How it is that Protestants, very much against Luther's will, and in spite of themselves, are

obliged to admit such impossibilities, and to look by turns here and there for an untenable argument; this I *now* indeed understand, but *formerly* I did not. I only perceived that nothing could give me a right, either simply to put aside one of the most solemn decisions of Christ, as if it were not written in Holy Scripture, or to explain it in such a manner as to limit it only to the very first age of Christianity;—which would reduce this part of the work of eternity to the work of a day.

Moreover, it could not escape me, that there is an intimate connection between the power of forgiving sins granted to the apostles, and *the confession of sin* which is prescribed in Holy Scripture as one of the conditions for pardon—though Protestants do not require it. In 1 St. John i. 9, I read: "*If we confess our sins*, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity;" and that in this passage *confession* does not mean an interior acknowledgment of sin, but a true *confession*, that is to say, an oral avowal of sins really committed, appeared to me from St. James v. 16, "Confess, therefore, your sins one

to another," and from Acts xix. 18, "And many of those who believed came, confessing and declaring their deeds," whilst I found in St. Matthew iii. 6, and in St. Mark i. 5, that even the baptism administered by St. John the Baptist was preceded by the same confession of sin. Have all those passages from Holy Scripture really lost their meaning? and are we allowed to consider ourselves discharged from a duty which was so evidently binding on the primitive Christians? Why should not *this* apostolic precept bind us, and why are we allowed to consider it as intended only for contemporaries? In vain I sought for an answer which was more than a pretext.

In the above-cited epistle of St. James v. 14, 15, I read: "Is any man sick among you? let him bring in the *priests* of the Church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him." It matters very little whether the word *presbyter* is translated by *priest* or by *elder*, but why do Protestants ne-

glect also this precept and promise of the apostle? What right have they to slight, as a childish or bigoted performance, the ceremony with which, as the apostle declares, there was connected such a special grace? Is it, or is it not, written in the Sacred Scriptures, which you acknowledge as the infallible Word of God? If so, how can you have had the boldness to erase it from the Bible? Are the whims of this or that Reformer the criterion of the obligation of accepting an apostolic dogma?

In reading Holy Scripture attentively I *could* no longer doubt of Christ's bestowing upon Peter a prerogative above all other apostles, and of His granting to him a *special vocation*, laid down in terms which can only be considered as exaggerations, if we are not to accept them in their deep sense. In St. Matthew xvi. 13–19, I read, that Jesus asked His disciples whom men took Him to be? and that thereupon He put the question to themselves: "But whom do you say that I am?" that Peter answered: "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God;" that Jesus thereupon said to Peter: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, because flesh and blood hath not

revealed it to thee, but My Father who is in heaven. And I say to thee, *That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build My Church;* and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. *And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.* And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven." And in St. Luke xxii. 31, 32, I read: "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. *But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and thou being once converted, confirm thy brethren.*" The antithesis between *you* in v. 31 and the singular number *thee* and *thou* in v. 32, can in the original text still less escape one's attention. In St. John xxi. 15–17, I found: "When, therefore, they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter: Simon, son of John, *lovest thou Me more than these?* He saith to Him: Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith to him: *Feed My lambs.* He saith to him again: Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me? He saith to Him: Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith to him: *Feed My lambs.* He saith to him the third time: Simon,

son of John, lovest thou Me? Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, lovest thou Me? and he said to Him: Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee. He said to him: *Feed My sheep.*"

It appeared to me that all these texts *must* lead to the conclusion that Christ built His Church especially upon Peter; that He implored and *consequently* received exclusively for Peter, an unshakable firmness of faith, from which firmness would proceed a special authority and fitness to confirm his brethren: finally, that shortly, or immediately before His Ascension, on account of the superior love of Peter, He confided to *this* apostle the duty of feeding His lambs and sheep.

And what, according to the Protestant doctrine, have been the effects of this plan of God, so impressively announced? *Nothing whatever.* Yea, if Protestantism is right in its struggle against Rome, Christ Himself was mistaken in His prediction; for in that case St. Paul, rather than St. Peter, may be called the rock upon which He built His Church, to be afterwards superseded, perhaps, in this dignity by St. John. I *will* not mention the attempt to give

a wrong turn to Christ's words, by applying the expression about Peter, only to the confession of his faith. It is not worth while to refute such a childish objection. Moreover, all the rest—the *decisive* passage of St. John xxi.—remains still intact. Were then those powerful words of the Lord in vain or of little importance? Can it be admitted that they had no other object than to secure for Peter the chair in the meeting for electing a successor of the apostate Judas, and at the Council of Jerusalem? Or that by the lambs and sheep confided to Peter's guidance, only the Jews were meant? Could *such* words be spoken by Christ as applicable *only* to the Peter who was to remain upon earth but thirty years? Was the rock upon which the Church was built destined so soon to crumble to pieces? Were the keys of the kingdom of heaven from that time confided to nobody, and was faith to be so soon deprived of its immovable basis, and the brethren of their confirmer? Were the lambs and sheep to be so soon left without a chief pastor? Let no one say that that foundation and that shepherd is Christ, for that He was as much during Peter's life as afterwards.

But Christ thought it well to appoint in Peter a visible basis of faith, and a visible pastor of the sheep as His substitute upon earth. There is no Protestant who can deny this without tearing the passage in St. Luke xxii. 32, and the last chapter of St. John's Gospel, out of his Bible.

Was that appointment a divine institution which was to last even *to the consummation of the world*, or was it really no more than a *caprice* in favour of Peter who died soon? As I sought nothing but truth, I could not possibly doubt of it; and I should have done violence to my understanding, and denied Christ, if I had given to His most solemn decisions such a meaningless interpretation.

When I read in St. Matthew xxvi. 26–28, in St. Mark xiv. 22–24, in St. Luke xxii. 19, 20, always the same unequivocal words with regard to the bread and the wine—"*This* is *My body*, *this* is *My blood of the New Testament*"—I could not be satisfied with an interpretation which renders these positive words false or powerless. To the "reformed" Protestant (in opposition to the Lutheran, who, with regard to this chief point, have only

mutilated the doctrine of the Church, and not rejected it), the bread and the wine of the Eucharist are *not* the body and blood of Christ. For, whether he considers the Supper to be only a particular commemoration of the Lord; or whether he believes that to those who are worthy partakers, together with the bread and the wine, a strength is communicated which emanates from Christ; or whether he admits one, or any other of the interpretations, in which the subtility of the Reformers, and of Protestant theologians of later time, has abounded — the bread and the wine themselves always *remain* to him what they were, and never *are really* what Christ intended them to be.

The doctrine "of the bread of life," stated in a few words in St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, is explained in the 6th chapter of St. John's Gospel, and this too appeared to me quite inconsistent with the Protestant doctrine. It was impossible to me not to see and feel the connection existing between the contents of this chapter and the institution of the holy Supper (this is the name by which Protestants call the Blessed Sacrament, and which I myself used

at that time). I read there: "I am the bread of life; this is the bread coming down from heaven; that if any one eat of it, he may not die; I am the living bread, which came down from heaven; *if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever:* and the bread which I will give *is My flesh*, for the life of the world." In answer to the question of the Jews: "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" I heard Our Lord insisting still more strongly: "Amen, amen, I say unto you, *unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you.* He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. *For My flesh is meat* INDEED, and *My blood is drink* INDEED. He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me, and I in him. *As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father; so he* THAT EATETH ME, *the same also shall live by Me.* This is the bread that came down from heaven. Not as your fathers did eat manna, and died; He that eateth this bread shall live for ever." When I asked myself earnestly what might be the meaning of these words, which

seem to be a superfluous repetition of the same idea, and always are equally *positive*, and do not admit of any misrepresentation, and yet are at the same time so wonderful—I *could* find no other explanation, save that Christ would *compel* us faithfully to accept His words, *as they were spoken*. Not only the Jews, but also many of His disciples, even then made remarks upon the strangeness and the harshness of these words, but instead of listening to their objections —and, if Our Lord had spoken figuratively, certainly not superfluous objections—Christ reproached them for their unbelief; and when they went away murmuring, He said to the twelve nothing but this: "Will you also go away?" at which question Peter gave the only answer, which, having regard to the *apparent* absurdity and *real* impenetrability of the highest mystery of his faith, every Christian ought to give, namely: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed, and have confessed that Thou art the Christ the Son of God," which is as much as to say: "Thou art the Son of God, *Thou hast said it in the most positive words*, what do we need more?"

I had not at that time, however, the slightest idea of the blissful happiness which is connected with the worthy use of the Blessed Sacrament to the faithful. I knew not then the beautiful doctrine of Holy Mass; I stood as yet in the presence of a mystery, which appeared to me inexplicable, and I saw *nothing* but the veil which my understanding could not penetrate—a veil behind which my soul later on in adoring admiration was to perceive the Holy of Holies. However, I remained with the twelve, I was not scandalised by the *harsh* language of the Lord, and did not try, as Protestants do, artificially to soften down the above-cited words of which Christ finally said: "The words that I have spoken to you ARE SPIRIT AND LIFE," and this under pretext of *making* them spirit and life. The *true life* of Christ's words I could not comprehend, but it was evident to me that *Protestants* did *not* comprehend it, and that they in this place also, instead of the incomprehensible Christ of Holy Scripture, had put a Christ of their own making.

In St. John xiv. 16–18, and 25, 26, I found the following promise of our Lord: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete,

that He may abide with you FOR EVER: the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, nor knoweth Him: but you shall know Him; *because He shall abide with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.* These things have I spoken to you, remaining with you. *But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you.*" The same promise I found confirmed and extended in St. John xvi. 12–15: "*I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.* But when He, the Spirit of truth, shall come, *He will teach you all truth:* for He shall not speak of Himself; but what things soever He shall hear, He shall speak: and the things that are to come, He will show you. He shall glorify Me; because He shall receive of Mine, and will declare it to you. All things whatsoever the Father hath are Mine, therefore, I said, that He shall receive of Mine, and will declare it to you." As it was impossible for me to deny in the last words the doctrine of

the triune God, so I could not but understand the whole promise in this sense that, after the Ascension of the Son of God, *the Holy Ghost would remain with His own for ever, and would teach them all truth*, and that truth too to which Christ, during His life in this world, had judged His Apostles not to be as yet equal. When I asked *in what manner* the Lord had fulfilled His salutary promise, Protestantism referred me to the passage in the Acts ii., where the coming down of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost is related. In that event, however, I could only perceive a partial, a *temporary* fulfilment of Our Lord's promise, since the Apostles were *not* destined *to remain till the end of the world.* They indeed were not left as orphans, but at their death all Christians would be so. Was the Holy Ghost also, after the Son of God had ascended into heaven, at the death of the last of the Apostles, to disappear from the earth? Was He to be a comforter and infallible teacher of truth exclusively for the Apostles? This appeared to me to be inconsistent with God's mercy, and the *eternal* and *universal* character of the work

of Redemption, and above all, contrary to the evident words of the promise itself. I learned moreover from different passages of Holy Scripture (see, for instance, Acts vi. 3–6; viii. 15–17; x. 44–47; xiii. 2–4; xix. 2–6; xx. 28), that *the same* gift, which on the day of Pentecost was bestowed upon the Apostles, later on, had been given to others of the faithful. Protestants *are obliged* to grant that the reception of the Holy Ghost was no exclusive prerogative of the Apostles, whilst they *must*, at the same time, admit that it is an absurdity to suppose God the Holy Ghost performing His task imperfectly. This must have been the case, however, according to their views, since He, *the Spirit of truth*, did not teach *all truth* to His own, with whom He was to remain TO THE END OF THE WORLD; but, on the contrary, permitted them to fall into divers errors, and allowed the pure Christian doctrine, shortly after the decease of the Apostles, to be adulterated and corrupted by various human additions. According to the Protestant theory, He tried indeed to repair the damage, which He promised to prevent, by

means of the "blessed Reformation"—but, alas! without success; for that Reformation produced innumerable sects, which, *with regard to the most important articles of Christian faith*, are as much opposed to each other as they are opposed to the Catholic Church. Where, amid that chaos of doctrines, is *the truth*, the knowledge of which Christ promised to us? Where is the *Comforter* who was *to indemnify* us for His absence? Can it be possible thatt he Lord Jesus, if He himself came down upon earth again, would permit the Church to be divided, faith to be uncertain, and truth to be blindfolded, *as that Comforter has done*—on the supposition that Protestants are right? Our Lord could not have permitted this, nor can He have sent us an unavailing Comforter, or uttered a lying promise of assistance—consequently, such a state of things must be the result, not of His promise, but of *the fault of the Reformers.*

IX.

As far as I can remember, I have given the objections which, in reading Holy Scripture, I raised against Protestantism. I could easily *now* expand these objections, but I only intend to write an accurate narrative, and not a dogmatic treatise. Such as they were, however, they struck me so forcibly, as to convince me that Protestantism had mutilated the doctrines of Holy Scripture, and only retained it partially. To such a preference of human judgment to the Word of God I could not consent, and I resolved to renew my prayer, and inquire into the teaching of the Catholic Church, to see whether I could find there *the whole truth*.

Fear and hope divided my heart. I was afraid that Catholicism would urge me to believe too much, as Protestantism had concealed too much from me. I was afraid to escape from unbelief only by falling into bigotry; that instead of a mutilated Christ an

adorned one would be given to me for adoration, and that the *true Christ* whom I sought was not anywhere to be found. In that case, if I had to stand alone before God, and to find out by myself the way which leads to the Redeemer, should I be able to discover the truth by my own power? . . . . .

On the other hand, I was encouraged, and felt a presentiment of my future certainty, when I thought that just the very points about which Protestantism, in my opinion, differed from Holy Scripture, formed the basis of the charges which I always heard made against the Catholic Church. I always had been taught to despise confession and the priestly absolution as sources of scandalous abuses; to reject the spiritual supremacy of the Pope as an absurd usurpation, to consider Holy Mass as idolatry, and the real presence of the Body and Blood of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine as a foolish mistake; to limit the infallible teaching of the Holy Ghost to the first ages of the Church, and only to grant Him, with regard to His illuminating action of later times, an unequal impression upon the mind of every Christian in particular. I knew that just those

things were alleged as *fundamental objections* against the Roman doctrine, about which an accommodation was not conceivable nor a reconciliation possible,—which same things were immediately opposed to *my own* objections against Protestantism. This, however, was not a sufficient motive for admitting that the Catholic Church had never erred upon these points; since it was *possible* that she was wrong by going too far on the opposite side. But still of this I was quite convinced, that the Reformation, by separating itself in these points from the Catholic Church, had separated itself at the same time from Christianity. This conviction made me *suppose* that the cause of both Christianity and Catholicism would be fundamentally the same, or at least inseparably connected. What else could have moved the Reformers to destroy the doctrine of Holy Scripture together with the spurious additions of the Church? Why were they not able, instead of the Catholic interpretation, to give one which might appear *true* to every honest reader of the Bible?

My inquiry, moreover, led me to other conclusions which necessarily increased my former sympathy with

Catholicism. I had heard it described (and it had often made this impression upon me) as overladen with forms and exterior show, so that the free obedience of a Christian's heart was fettered by various and troublesome precepts, and a mysterious power attributed to certain ceremonies. I will give later on my own experience of the former ground of reproach, but with regard to the latter, I understood even then that the objection, if a sound one, strikes at the whole of Christianity and its founder. For, is the ceremony of Baptism itself, *apparently*, anything else but a ceremony, namely, the pouring out of a little water over the body of the baptized, whilst at the same time a certain form of words are pronounced? And yet Christ has, as emphatically as possible, declared the decision of the eternal life of men to depend upon this ceremony: "He that believeth, *and is baptized*, shall be saved; unless a man be born again *of water* and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." And lastly, He said to His disciples, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, *baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;* teaching them to

observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." It is as clear as the day that the ceremony of baptism with water, is everywhere pronounced to be one of the two principal requisites to salvation. Certainly it surpasses our understanding, and we see ourselves in presence of a *divine mystery*, which here upon earth never will be entirely solved—but the necessity of exterior baptism can only be denied by those who reject Christ as the infallible teacher of truth, and Holy Scripture as His infallible Word. *Therefore*, Protestants, who do not wish to do this, are not allowed to condemn *the principle* upon which the Catholic Church teaches certain exterior actions to be required for an interior effect, and the question alone remains, *how far* the Church, in every particular case, has been justified in doing so. Instead of rejecting them *en masse*, Protestants are bound to inquire into *details*, from which a Catholic is relieved on account of his confidence in the infallibility of the Church.

Indeed, it cannot be denied that Holy Scripture in this respect is filled with Catholicism. Even if we confine ourselves to the New Testament, and only take

those examples, which I at present remember, this ought to strike a Protestant when he considers: that the Apostle St. James prescribes the anointing of the sick with oil in the name of the Lord (St. James v. 14); that the gifts of the Holy Ghost were given by the imposition of the hands of the Apostles (for instance, Acts vi. 6; viii. 17; xiii. 3; xix. 6), and of others besides the Apostles (for instance, Acts ix. 12–17); that our Lord often chose to precede His miracles by some exterior action (see a striking instance in St. John ix. 6, 7; another one in St. Mark vii. 33, 34; and further, St. Matthew ix. 29; xxi. 34; St. Luke iv. 35, 39, 40; v. 13; xxii. 51), when the single word of His Omnipotence, which He used on other occasions, would have appeared to *us* so much more worthy; that the wise men from the East were led to the infant Jesus by a moving star, whereas *we* should have thought the voice of an interior impulse sufficient; that the sick were brought forth into the streets, *that the shadow of Peter might deliver them from their infirmities* (Acts v. 15); that others were cured and evil spirits were expelled by the imposition of the handkerchiefs and aprons of St. Paul (Acts xix. 12).

All these things are, in my opinion, out of place in Protestantism—but *in that case* Protestantism too was out of place in the Christianity of Holy Scripture.

In a word, I was no longer a Protestant, and felt myself attracted to the Catholic Church. But with regard to her, I was as yet uninitiated and strange, and I understood not the divine harmony of her doctrine, of which only a few beams shone upon me.

X.

PERCEIVING that Catholic guidance was indispensable for continuing my inquiries, I went to the Rev. Father Claesens,* and asked access to his library, which was most willingly granted. I do not remember whether I opened my mind to him then, or at a later time, but I know for certain that this priest at first as well as at last abstained from exercising any influence upon the working of truth in my mind. His assistance, until the very moment of my return to the Church, consisted merely in lending me every book I wished to take with me, in giving me the explanations which I asked, and in refuting the objections which I proposed to him; also he advised me not to be hasty in arriving at a final conclusion. I was surprised to experience a spirit just the contrary of that proselytism of which

* The Rev. Father Claesens was at that time parish priest at Batavia; last year he has been elected Vicar Apostolic of Batavia and Bishop of Tranopoli i.p.i.

I had often heard Catholic priests accused; indeed, I felt almost inclined to suspect *this* priest of a certain degree of indifference. I need not ask your pardon, my dear benefactor, for that most unjust suspicion; I have learned since to esteem you as you deserve, and if I do not say here what you are, as I did of your departed colleague, the Rev. Father Van der Grinten, it is only because my respect for you could not express itself except in words offensive to your humility. This only I may say, that my former surprise has changed into admiration for your discretion, which is as rare as it is wise. Imperfect as it is, I offer up my prayer each day for you before the throne of God, as for a second father in Christ, who has led me into His Church, and given me for the first time to taste the blessed repose, which the priestly word of grace grants, in our Lord's name, to every repenting sinner.

In the library of Father Claesens the works of Bossuet immediately attracted my attention. I read over the "Histoire des Variations du Protestantisme," with all the notices attached to it, also the "Exposition de la Doctrine Catholique," the "Con-

férence avec le Ministre Claude," the "Sermon sur l'Unité de l'Église," and many other works of the same excellent preacher of Catholic truth. The first and most important of the things he taught me are: that Protestantism, emanating from negation and the rejection of existing truth, has wofully failed in its attempts to rebuild a firm Christian doctrine of faith; and that the Catholic Church is the Church with which Christ promised to be "all days even to the consummation of the world," consequently *the Church of Christ*.

I will try to sum up in a few pages the arguments, by the aid of which, under the guidance of Bossuet, I arrived at this conclusion. With regard to the first part I can be very short, for never more than here does the principle avail, that where facts prove, words are superfluous. Whether one consults the history of the so-called Reformation, or looks around in our own days—always and everywhere there is no unity to be seen in Protestantism, except in its hatred against Rome. Neither the doctrine of justification by faith alone, nor the doctrine, denying free will and teaching absolute predestination to salvation or eternal ruin:

neither the Lutheran doctrine about the Sacraments, nor that of Calvin and Zwingli—was able to form a lasting point of agreement between the various Protestant sects. Luther himself did not teach any positive doctrine, and it is as easy, as it is frequent, to make him contradict himself, even where there is question of fundamental principles. Still more wavering and mutable was his most faithful follower Melanchthon, who, for instance, from an adversary of free will, became a defender of it. Calvin and Zwingli were able to bring their teaching more logically into one system, in some respects at least, but they could do so only by destroying common sense, and disowning divine justice to such a degree, that the greater part of their so-called followers would abhor the doctrine, if put before them in the genuine sense, and in the very words of the Reformers themselves. How few Protestants will dare to call Almighty God, after Zwingli, the author, promoter, and tempter of evil ("adulterii aut homicidii *autor*, *motor* et *impulsor*"); or to maintain with Calvin, that sin is committed by God's impulsion ("Dei *impulsu*")! How few will not shrink back from asserting with

Beza, that God created a certain number of men *with the intention* of performing by them the evil which He ordered! How few will not shrink back from Calvin's proposition, that God excites in some men, destined to reprobation, a hypocritical faith, with the intention of making them still more guilty and less excusable!*

Which of the different Lutheran, or Reformed confessions, or other writings, are to be considered as the genuine expression of the Protestant doctrine of faith? Every sect, of course, answers this question in a different manner. When one day I asked a brother of mine the same question, he referred me to *the first edition* of the *Loci Theologici* of Melanchthon; for, he added, Melanchthon himself corrupted his system in the later editions. Is a more severe criticism of Protestantism possible, than that which these words imply? A dogma, which remained only a few years incorrupt, to be the *true* dogma of Christianity! One may object, that Melanchthon's later errors did not alter the soundness of his former explanation; but nearly every

* The passages given above are, among others, quoted verbatim in Möhler's *Symbolik*.

Protestant is a Luther or a Melanchthon with regard to the instability of his religious conviction, and perhaps there are not to be found two Protestant theologians who quite agree together upon every principal article of faith. The renowned proverb: "in necessary things unity, in doubtful things liberty, in all things charity," * has a positive meaning for Catholics only, for the Church teaches most definitively, where the limits between the necessary and the doubtful are. On the contrary, for a Protestant nothing is more doubtful than the answer to the question, *what* is of necessity? To retain an apparent unity he is each time obliged to diminish the number of things necessarily to be believed; each time he is forced to abandon another dogma, which he himself or his predecessors considered to be of vital importance, and in doing so the difference between faith and unbelief grows each time smaller and more indistinct, since a false toleration exhorts him to extend the limits of the Church rather than to reject every one who denies the truth.

In this continual dilemma a Protestant is obliged

* "In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus charitas."

to choose: *either* an intolerance much greater than that with which he reproaches the Catholic Church, and a principle of exclusion by which the axiom, "no salvation outside the Church," is to be applied to a very small circle of unanimous people; *or* an unlimited indulgence, by which the Christian Church is opened to *everybody*, who pretends to honour Christ by calling himself a Christian after Him, *whatever* he may observe and profess as his personal doctrine. At the entrance of that Church the *reformed word* ought then to be written: unity in name, liberty in essence, indifference in all.

My father sought the extreme bulwark of Christian unity in the divinity of Christ, without requiring conformity concerning the question *how* this admitted connection between God and Christ ought to be understood. One would think that tolerance could not possibly go farther. Well then, even during his life Protestants began to deny that the line between faith and unbelief, between Christianity and infidelity, could be drawn even here. And now, sixteen years after his death, the admission of this limit would exclude from Christianity the greater part of the so-

called *educated* Protestants in our country. For, even if they continue to call Christ the Son of God, it is in a sense which has lost not only the orthodox meaning, but every really definite idea.

The difference between Protestants and Protestants has become much wider than the original difference between Catholics and Protestants. The orthodox Protestant will not deny that a Catholic can obtain salvation in his Church, but he is obliged to consider the same as impossible to the modern Protestant, who, in denying Christ's divinity, denies also the truth of His miracles and of His resurrection; who, in rejecting the existence of the devil, rejects also original sin and the eternal punishment of impenitent sinners; who, in a word, lowers Christianity to a religious system, which is sullied by all sorts of fables. And yet the modern Protestant is the *true* continuer of the work of the Reformers, although in a superficial view he may not *seem* to be their most faithful follower.

Melanchthon, says Nicolas, "in writing the programme of Protestantism, has already given the epitaph of Christianity, and of every religion, when he

declared that the articles of faith are often to be changed, and ought to be the expression of different times and circumstances." Modern Protestants—who do not date to-day or yesterday, but from the very beginning of the Reformation—have understood and followed out in practice this maxim of the author of the *Loci Theologici* much better than the orthodox have done. The principle of rejecting all authoritative faith, originally directed only against the Catholic Church, *they* have employed, with at least as much right, against the writings of their predecessors and the symbolic books of their sects. From this they went on to directing it against the authors of Holy Scripture, and finally against Christ Himself, and they have been successful in every new turn of that struggle for "liberty of thought." As soon as the Catholic Church had been rejected, and the houses and cottages of the great and little Reformers destroyed, the temple of Holy Scripture, and finally the divine image of Christ, gave way to their blows. Nothing remains, *nothing* . . . but the still enduring "idea of God." But even its hours are counted; at least we were told so, not long ago

by a Dutch author in an Italian periodical paper. With its fall, and not till then, Luther's magnificent work, of which he himself could only foresee a small part, will be finished, and the kingdom of true liberty of conscience established upon earth, which, in this sense, means: *the kingdom of Satan.* Happy are you, Protestant fellow-Christians, who with us are waging the holy war for the incarnate Word of God; yes, in one respect you are more worthy of praise than we are, because, deprived as you are of the immovable support of Christ's Church, by which we defy unbelief, you still do not lose courage, although you feel the ground sinking under your feet, whilst we are standing quite safe upon the rock of Peter. Happy are you, because the firm stand you make against error is an almost certain guarantee of your return to eternal truth. However, be not deceived any longer by thinking that the evil spirit of modern opinions is not *the true* child of the spirit of the Reformation; or rather understand, that *the same* proud and godless spirit, who is now casting aside the useless mask, was already at work in Luther

and in Calvin. They did not know him in his true shape, and Almighty God will not judge them on account of the evil, which they did not foresee, but *you* know him, and *you* witness around you the work of devastation which he has produced. Make haste to renounce that spirit of untruth, who is striving, although in vain, yet to the ruin of many, to bring shame upon our Lord's prayer for the perfect unity of His Church; hasten to take refuge in those arms, which she extends to you full of divine love—in order that you may never come to hear the sad words: "How often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not!"

XI.

CHRIST founded an infallible Church, and that Church is the Catholic Church. Grant me Thy assistance, O Lord, that I may find words of sufficient power, not to convince my erring brethren of this double truth, as I am convinced of it, but to move them to inquiry which, by the help of Thy grace, *must* lead them to that conviction!

The Son of God came down upon earth to save sinners. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," and "he that seeth Me, seeth the Father also, who sent Me," thus said He to His hearers, and thus He answered for every one the question: What have I to do to be saved? But it was only granted to a few, and that for a short time, to see the Son of God upon earth, and to receive the word of eternal life from His mouth. What an *infinite* prerogative would those few elect have enjoyed above all humankind in His infallible teaching, if, by His Ascension,

that teaching had disappeared from the earth! For to them there could not possibly remain the slightest uncertainty, or the slightest difference of opinion in matters of faith, required for salvation, because the merciful Saviour *never* refused His guidance, when it was sought for sincerely and to satisfy spiritual wants. But, as "every mind has its secrets," so every soul has its own wants, and *if* Jesus Christ were to come again to Palestine, how, Protestant fellow-Christians, would you speed to Him from all parts of the world to propose for His decision those two questions: Lord, did I, or my brother of another persuasion, understand Thy doctrine *rightly?* and: Lord, what have *I* to do to be sure of eternal life? Of the young man, who kept the commandments and loved his neighbour as himself, Thou didst require that he should give all his goods to the poor—*what dost Thou require from me?* Speak, and I will submit, although I should have to confess my errors; command, and I will obey, no matter how severe Thy commandment may be!

Thus would you do, Protestant fellow-Christians, who are in earnest about Christianity—but we Catholics should be dispensed from the trouble and

fatigue of such a journey to Palestine. We consider ourselves in no respect to be less privileged than the contemporaries and fellow-countrymen of our Lord. Just as St. Lewis did not desire to see a miracle, which was reported to him as taking place in a neighbouring church, because *his* faith did not want that confirmation,—so should *we* deem it unnecessary to go to the visible Lord Jesus in order to obtain that certitude in the doctrine of faith and morals, which we already enjoy as members of His Church. For *we know* that the infallible teaching of our Saviour, Who ascended into heaven, *has been* carried on without interruption, and *will* be continued by the Catholic Church till the consummation of the world. That God designed to extend His mercy equally to *all*, who would faithfully accept the offered redemption in Christ; that He did not intend to grant a prerogative to the then existing generation, and to those who conversed with Our Lord, above future generations; that He, therefore, intended that a voice as firm and authoritative as that which came from His own mouth should be heard through all ages—*all this* we know, because He Himself has declared

it. I refer first to those passages of Holy Scripture already cited above, wherein was promised the Comforter, who for ever was to remain with the Apostles, and was to teach them *all truth*, including that truth which Christ for wise reasons as yet did not reveal to them. I refer again to St. Matthew xxviii. 18–20: "And Jesus, coming, spoke to them, saying: All power is given to me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and *teach all nations;* baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; *teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you;* AND BEHOLD I AM WITH YOU ALL DAYS, EVEN TO THE CONSUMMATION OF THE WORLD." To St. Luke x. 16: "HE THAT HEARETH YOU HEARETH ME." To St. John xx. 21: "As *the Father hath sent me, I also send you,*" and ver. 23: "*Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.*"

In these texts I read as clearly as possible, that the infallible teaching of the Son of God after His Ascension will be continued and *supplemented* by the Holy Ghost; that this teaching will last *for ever*, that is

to say, till "time shall be no more" (Apoc. x. 6); that Christ appointed the Apostles, as the *interpreters* of this teaching, and (since *they* could not live for ever and visit all nations) that He also appointed to this office those legal successors to whom the Apostles communicated the authority, which they had received from Him, and whom *they* commissioned again, as He had commissioned *them*;—so that it is *quite the same* to us whether we hear either these interpreters or their Master; finally, that the infallibility, which was given to them in matters of faith, extends itself also to matters of discipline, so that their judgment is for a sinner of the same value as if it were pronounced in heaven. Indeed, I cannot possibly understand how a Christian, who reveres Holy Scripture as the Word of God, and admits that this word can neither be untrue nor senseless; how a Christian, I say, can find an interpretation *really* distinct from the one, conformable to the Catholic doctrine, which I have given. If this interpretation is correct, and, as I believe it to be, undeniable for all Christians who seek nothing but truth, then the question alone remains, *Where* are the legal successors of the Apostles to be found? If

the *uninterrupted* and *infallible* teaching in matters of faith and discipline, which Christ promised, is nowhere to be found, then He has not kept His positive promise—which is impossible, and yet no Protestant *can* give a decisive answer as to where it is. They contest the infallibility of the Catholic Church, but they do not venture to assert that one of their sects, or one of their confessions, is infallible. On the contrary, they declare expressly: "let the Synods decide according to their opinion. If you are not of their opinion, follow your own, and nevertheless you will be a true child of the Reformed Church." Thus spoke Calvin, and thus *must* every Protestant speak, who rejects authoritative faith. But Christ says (St. Matthew xviii. 17): "And if he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican." *Where*, then, is this Church of Christ, which has a *right* to our unlimited faith and unlimited obedience as He Himself had?

That Church is the Catholic Church, and *her* Bishops are the legal successors of the Apostles. She alone dates from the beginning of Christianity; she alone possesses the fulfilment of the promises, which

Christ made to His Church ; she alone is founded upon the rock, upon the Peter whose faith never will fail.

The Catholic Church, and she alone, dates from the beginning of Christianity. She was founded on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost descended in a visible form upon the Apostles; on the day on which three thousand people became, with them, the first-born of the visible communion in Christ. This communion *immediately* showed itself exteriorly by hearing together the same doctrine, by partaking together of the same Sacraments, and by praying together (Acts ii. 42). Since that day this triple communion of the faithful has been continued uninterruptedly in the Catholic Church. The members of it *always* have heard, and do still *all* hear, the same doctrine from the Bishops and the priests assisting them. These Bishops and priests received this doctrine from the predecessors who ordained them, who in their turn, during the course of the nineteen centuries of Christianity, received it from *their* predecessors in the same manner, and with the same authority with which it was conferred by the Apostles upon their own co-operators and

immediate successors. They have *always* continued in "the same breaking of bread," that is to say (1 Cor. x. 16), "the communion *of the body of Christ;*" they have *always* been united in the same worship of God. The most vehement opponent of Catholicism is not able to point out a date, between the first day of Pentecost and the present time, of which he dares say: *here* the Catholic Church began to exist, or *here* she ceased to exist. He may pretend that Christ, contrary to His positive promise, has not remained *all days* with His Church, which was founded on the day of Pentecost; that the Comforter, who was to come after Him, contrary to His promise, has not taught her *all truth*, but on the contrary could not prevent the creeping in of various errors; further, that contrary to His prayer, the faith of Peter failed several times, and that he seduced his brethren rather than confirmed them; in a word, he may pretend that the Catholic Church has not fulfilled her duty and her vocation—but it is *impossible* to him, I do not say to prove, but to pretend with the least appearance of truth, that the Catholic Church and her Bishops do not descend *in a direct line*,

and by *an uninterrupted succession,* from the Church of the three thousand people, and from the Apostles. *Never* has an attempt been made to ascribe to her any other birthday than the first day of Pentecost.

In the same way it is impossible to deny that the Protestant sects, *taken as churches or visible communities,* came to exist at a much later period, which is definitively to be pointed out, at which they separated themselves from the then existing Catholic Church, or were expelled by her, because they would not subject themselves any longer to some doctrine or practice, which had for a long time been admitted in that Church. Hence it must be admitted that they descend *neither* in a direct line, *nor* by uninterrupted succession, from the primitive Church, and it must be said, according to the assertion of Protestants, that after a long deviation they returned to her; that they have *not always* retained the same doctrine, the same Sacraments, and the same prayer as the primitive Christians did; finally, that the priests or preachers of these sects are *not* the legal successors of the Apostles, by virtue of a continually-transferred ordination.

The Catholic Church, and she alone, possesses the fulfilment of the promises which Christ made to His Church, namely: the promises of unity and the gift of miracles. The unity of the Church was foretold by Christ in His beautiful prayer, in St. John xvii. 20–23: "And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given to them: *that they may be one, as we also are one.* I in them, and Thou in Me: *that they may be made perfect in one;* and the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast also loved Me."

The gift of miracles again was conferred by Our Lord's words, in St. Mark xvi. 17, 18: "And these signs shall follow them that believe: In My name they shall cast out devils: they shall speak with new tongues: they shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall

not hurt them; they shall lay their hands upon the sick, and they shall recover."

As none of the Protestant sects have dared to ascribe to themselves infallibility, so none have ventured to believe in the continuance of the promise of unity, and of the gift of miracles. For, that belief would be their sentence of death. Miracles, as they say, are no longer wanted; and if it is allowed to admit them for a short time after the death of the Apostles, it is certain, at any rate, that they existed no longer than until the overthrow of heathen society in Europe.

As to the unity of the faithful, for which Christ prayed, by this we have not to understand an external visible, an *ecclesiastical* unity, but a higher internal unity of the souls, which, even with the difference of opinion concerning certain articles of faith, is possible and really exists among all sincere Christians. But what sincere Christian is there who, after some reflection, will not be obliged to admit, that such a limited interpretation of Christ's words does not agree with their strength and generality; that a merely internal and indefinite unity only,

is as little spoken of in St. John's Gospel as a merely temporary grant of wonderful power is intended in St. Mark's; therefore the Church, which can *truly* be called the Church of Christ, ought to have a right to *the same complete unity* amongst her children, in the faith required for salvation, as exists between the three persons in God Himself—and also to the *continual* proof of her divine mission, by extraordinary signs proceeding from God's omnipotence. The Catholic Church *alone* professes to possess that right: she declares herself to be completely one, and to be confirmed by miracles throughout all ages.

XII.

The following thought always made a particular impression on me, and will, as I believe, have the same effect on every earnest mind. There is scarcely any thinking man who has not to admit that he has changed his opinion, in the course of his life, with regard to certain important questions, and that he has been obliged by growing experience, or deeper inquiry, to reject something, be it much or little, which formerly he considered as true. "*Il y a des gens qui ne changent jamais de pensée*," said Mirabeau, when he was reproached with such a change of opinion, "*ce sont les gens qui ne pensent jamais*." It is still more difficult to find a permanent agreement between two persons, concerning *all* questions of an ecclesiastical, a political, or a scientific nature. Now, multiply these two by many millions; prolong man's life to eighteen or nineteen centuries; remember, at the same time, the influence of the

very different circumstances in which humanity has been placed at various periods of this considerable part of its existence; remember the perfectly distinct relation between Church and State and Society in heathen Rome, during the Middle Ages, and in later times; remember the power of passions, of interests, of ever-increasing science; and then look at the history of the Catholic Church and the development of the Catholic dogma.

If, on the one hand, you perceive a scene of persecution, contest, hatred and schism, in a word, a scene of human misery to which there is perhaps not to be found an equal; and, on the other hand, you perceive, in all that confusion and in all that struggle, a doctrine of faith founding, developing, and always defining itself more clearly; a doctrine of faith which, in the course of time, grows up, as a tree from its seed, from the foundation laid by Christ, into an edifice, which more and more approaches its completion, whilst its parts unite themselves in the most perfect harmony, *and not a single stone of it is ever cast away*, or found to be unfit or superfluous—then, admit that you see before you a phe-

nomenon, which is *quite inexplicable* both to reason and experience. Seek as long as you will, you will not find any other explanation for it than this, that you behold the work of Him, whose power is made perfect in weakness, and the wonderful fulfilment of His last words: "I AM WITH YOU ALL DAYS, EVEN TO THE CONSUMMATION OF THE WORLD."

For observe, I do not now ask the admission of this or that Catholic dogma, but I am showing the *fact* of the historic and dogmatic unity of Catholicism; a fact which cannot be denied without narrow-minded cavilling. Is it not a proof that this astonishing fact cannot be denied, when against it only two or three obscure passages can be alleged, from the History of the Church during nineteen centuries; which passages, moreover, are not admitted by Catholics?

Besides applying to Christianity in general, the words of M. Nicolas already cited, are of force here also: "*Si la rêligion a toujours des obscurités qui servent de prétexte, elle a toujours des clartés qui ôtent tout excuse.*" The question is not whether it

is possible to raise objections against the truth here shown (as can be done against *every* truth), but whether the proof given is not enough for the conviction of every honest reader of history and philosophy. Of *such a one* I ask *either* evident and decisive proof that the Catholic Church has ever rejected a dogma, or taught one inconsistent with the other parts of her doctrine—and in that case I will admit that I have erred, and cease to be a Catholic; *or* else I ask the admission of my assertion, that there never existed, and does not at present exist, in her dogma, any real contradiction or discordance—and in that case I must go on to submit reverently to her who, during all the storms of ages, has so visibly been led and governed by her invisible Head, Christ. In that case, moreover, the very violence of the storms, which have not ceased to assail the bark of Peter since it was launched on the first day of Pentecost, is to me a most evident proof that the Lord, either sleeping or awake, has *always* been present in her. For otherwise she would as *certainly* have gone down, as she has *certainly* been saved.

In Protestant writings, especially in newspapers, frequent mention is made of the "struggle among Catholics," "of the parties in the Catholic Church," "of Moderate Catholics and Ultramontanes," and similar expressions. A Catholic *laughs* at such denominations, and does not take the trouble to ask whether they are the result of bad faith, or ignorance. Every true Catholic is an "Ultramontane," that is to say, he admits the Pope of Rome to be the visible head of the Church, the legal successor of Peter in feeding the lambs and sheep, and the supreme interpreter of ecclesiastical infallibility in matters of faith and morals. Although this article of his faith was declared not long ago, *more definitely* than it had been formerly; although God's providence has again been evidently manifested by taking away an appearance of uncertainty, which, though formerly perhaps useful, would, at the present time, have been most hurtful; EVERY Catholic nevertheless knows very well that the present doctrine of the Church, concerning the infallibility of the Pope, has always been the doctrine of the Church. Before the definition of the Vatican Council, it was

not understood by *everybody* in the same manner, *after* that definition not a single sincere Catholic can have the slightest doubt of it.

For, *above all*, it is certain that neither Christ nor His Church can err. "For it hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us"—with those words the Council of Jerusalem, "after there was much disputing" (Acts xv. 7), stopped the first difference of opinion among Christians. "For it hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us"—with those words the Vatican Council, "after much disputing," stopped the difference of opinion among the Christians of our days. *All* councils have, *at all times*, in the same manner, and with the same effect, maintained the perfect unity of the Catholic doctrine, as soon as it was necessary. Unbelief has *always* foretold that schism would be the consequence of the definition, and *never* has that prediction been fulfilled. Therefore, do not trouble yourselves, Protestant fellow-Christians, about the effects of the Vatican Council, and be sure of the result that, granting there are *some* of little faith, it will procure a great advantage to the Church by the confirmation of the faith of *all* her true children.

Among the members of the Catholic Church difference of opinion, in matters of faith and discipline, is only possible where there is question concerning matters, the certitude of which is not, or is not as yet, necessary for salvation. I say *not as yet*, because for salvation it is only necessary to believe truths that are of *faith*, that is to say, which are declared to be revealed; also because Christ Himself tells us that He did not teach His truth completely, during His life upon earth, but that He left a part of it to the Comforter, Who was to come after Him and *to remain for ever;* and finally because the teaching of that ever-guiding Comforter will continue until the consummation of the world, and the Christian faith will become continually clearer and more developed.* As far therefore as the Christian faith is taught by the Holy Ghost, and is proposed by the Church which He governs—so far the members of that

* It is to be remembered that the revelation given by Christ to His Apostles was completed by the descent of the Holy Ghost; therefore, it must not be supposed that anything has been or can be declared to be of faith which was not contained in that original revelation, although, as ages go by, that original teaching is more clearly brought out and explained by the Catholic Church, guided by the Spirit of God.

Church are one in faith with a completeness which may be compared with the union of the three persons in God. Is it necessary to add that no isolated facts can interfere with the perfectness of *the principle* of unity in the Catholic Church—of which principle only—as opposed to the Protestant theory of Christian unity—there is question? The point is not whether every one who calls himself a Catholic is a *true* Catholic, but what is the unity which, according to the doctrine of the Church, keeps her children united.

As the unity promised by Our Lord to His Church is manifested in faith, so also is it shown in the continual use of *the same* means of grace, and the maintenance, through all ages, and in all nations, of *the same* public worship. It seemed good to the Reformers to diminish, together with Holy Scripture, the number of the Sacraments which Christ instituted, and arbitrarily to reject what seemed superfluous.

Neither the forgiveness of sins by a sincere and penitent confession, together with the absolution of the priest, nor the confirmation of the faithful; neither the ordination to priesthood by the episcopal

imposition of hands, nor the sacramental character of Christian matrimony and the anointing of the sick, were, in their opinion, to be considered as *true* means of grace, and therefore, they taught that they might be *either* abrogated as superfluous, *or* modified in any way that was desired. Even the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar was *reformed* into a "holy supper," to which one Protestant gives a meaning totally different to that given by another. In the same way, in our days, some Protestants have discovered that a Christian is not obliged to be too scrupulous about the sacramental words and the real administration of the water in holy Baptism. The common worship of Protestants is reduced to hearing a sermon and—practically as a secondary thing—to prayer and singing in common. This, too, is out of the reach of all who do not understand the language in which it is performed.

The Catholic Church, on the contrary, has persevered, through all ages, in the doctrine and grateful use of *all* the Sacraments, to which Christ and His Apostles declared that there was attached a particular operation of divine grace; and the centre of this

worship has always been the same Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which, in every part of the world and among all nations, is offered to God in the same manner.* For this reason a Christian of the first centuries, if he were now to come back upon earth, would feel as much at home in *every* Catholic Church, as a Dutch Catholic, who, in our days, wishes to travel all over the world, and can join in Catholic worship, wherever it is to be found, with heart and soul, and with a substantial idea of all ceremonies used in Catholic rites. Where, then, is to be found that *perfect unity* of the Church of Christ, for which our Lord prayed so fervently, and which St. Paul, in his epistle to the Ephesians, describes so eloquently? Is it to be found amongst Protestants or amongst Catholics?

"Amen, amen I say to you, he that believeth in me, the works that I do he shall do also; and greater than these shall he do; because I go

* There are, however, a number of Liturgies. The Mass is celebrated according to different Oriental rites—for example, the Greek, the Syriac, &c., which are of great antiquity, and, though they differ from it in *form*, are in *substance* like the Latin Mass used in the Western Church.

to the Father. And whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." Thus spoke Christ (St. John xiv. 12, 13), and in His Church these words, as well as those in St. Mark xvi. 17, 18, have been continually fulfilled. She teaches us to believe that Almighty God, neither immediately after the creation of the world, nor immediately after the death of the Apostles, nor at any other period, resigned His power *to govern* the laws which He Himself gave to the spirit and matter; and that on the contrary He continued to work *miracles* as often as He judged these extraordinary signs of His omnipotence either necessary or useful. The Church does not deny that such signs were particularly required in the first days of Christianity,—the extension of which, throughout the world, has become a *permanent* miracle for all who are not blind; nor does she deny that *we* possess, in the fulfilment of the prophecies, *as evident* a sign as the sight of the raising of the dead was for those who heard those prophecies. The Church does not bind her children to believe in any particular miracle, save the

miracles related in Holy Scripture, and one may reject, as incredible, any *particular* miracle of later date without ceasing to be a Catholic, but it is anti-Catholic to pretend that Almighty God, in the following ages, is no longer *willing* to work, or *has* no longer worked miracles. The unlimited words of Christ are now as true to us as they were to His disciples; and if we experience their truth less, it is not only because the state of the Church has changed, and Christian religion has overturned paganism in Europe, but also because our faith is weaker and our prayer less ardent than that of the primitive Christians. Christ Himself always required faith in His power of working miracles, as an indispensable condition for the miracles which were asked of Him, and Holy Scripture relates expressly that He did not work many miracles, in His own country, *because of their unbelief* (St. Matthew xiii. 5-8). To those, only, who are full of faith, has He promised the power to do the same works which He did, and *greater than these*, that is to say, greater in as much as the duration of His Church was to exceed His stay upon earth. How rare in our

days is the unshakable and perfect faith of the Apostles and Martyrs, and of the Saints of former and later days! How few Christians would *dare* to ask the Father, in Christ's name, to use them as means for His miraculous glorification; how few, even if they ventured to do so, would not deprive their prayer of its effect by doubting whether Almighty God would hear it! Nevertheless, *neither* sincere believers, *nor* God's miracles have ceased to exist, and as often as these miracles are wrought with such a degree of certitude, that unbelief can deny and scoff but cannot explain or refute them, so often is it the Catholic Church which is favoured with these signs of God's assistance.

XIII.

The Catholic Church, and she alone, is founded upon the rock upon which Christ declared that He would build His Church; she alone is confirmed in faith by him, for whom Christ prayed that his faith might never fail; she alone hears the voice of the pastor to whom Christ confided the feeding of His lambs and sheep upon earth. *She is the bark of Peter, upon which the Lord Himself is present, and which for that reason never will be shipwrecked.*

I have mentioned above the passages of Holy Scripture, which, in my opinion, do not *admit* of any other interpretation than this, that Christ has united in Peter the authority which He gave to His Apostles, and that He conferred on him the chief government of His Church, together with the supreme maintenance of faith. I put forward arguments which I think *decisive*, which show why it is quite inconceivable that Christ should have bestowed an entirely

peculiar prerogative upon the Peter, who lived at His time, which prerogative was to cease at his death. An *eternal* Church requires an *eternal* foundation; a *never*-failing faith requires a certitude which is *never* to be lost, and which only can be obtained by confiding in Christ's most effective prayer *offered for Peter;* the Christian fold stands in need of a *permanent* visible pastor, for the same reason that it required one, according to the will and the decision of Christ, during Peter's life. All this is as clear to me as the day, and does not require further evidence. Equally certain is the fact, that the Catholic Church has continually been connected with Peter and his successors, and therefore always has been where Peter was. I am well aware that some Protestant theologians have tried to make this out to be doubtful, but I know also that not a single fact in the history of the world can be accepted as proved, if one is bold enough to reject the arguments for the continual succession of the Bishops of Rome to the See of Peter. The unanimous agreement of the Fathers of the Church, since the second century of our era, proves this succession to have existed, with only

such interruptions and difficulties as leave that room for cavilling which, by the permission of God, is never denied to any fact. Indeed, neither the Reformers nor the most sincere Protestant critics have ever drawn arguments from these difficulties and supposed intervals. They oppose *either* the primacy of Peter in its Catholic meaning, *or* the transfer of that primacy to his successors, but they do not deny that Peter, as pastor and teacher of the Christian Church, fixed his See at Rome, that he suffered that martyrdom which Christ had foretold, and that the Bishops of Rome go up, in an unbroken line, to him as their first predecessor. A conscientious inquiry into history will convince every Protestant of this, as it did such historians and philosophers as Leibnitz and Grotius. An introduction to this history may be found, for instance, in the very meritorious work (to which I personally owe much) of a Protestant convert, formerly minister of worship in Prussia, Ludolph von Beckedorff: "*Die Katholische Wahrheit, Worte des Friedens under Wiederversöhnung für gottesfürchtige Protestantische Christen*" (*dritte Aufl. Regensburg, G. T. Manz,*

1852) see the part: *Vom Papste und von der Hierarchie.*

Therefore: Christ appointed Peter, and in Peter his successors, as the visible head of His Church; Peter and his successors remained, throughout all ages of Christianity, the visible heads of the Catholic Church; whilst the sects, which are separated from her, have estranged themselves from his direction. Therefore, the Catholic Church is, for that reason also, the only true Church of Christ, and has alone a right to the fulfilment of the promise: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it;" *i.e.*, that she never will fail in the pure Christian faith.

She communicates that faith to all her children *by means of the teaching*, to which Christ (St. Matthew xxviii. 19) called her, and the infallibility of which He (ibid. 20) secured to her. The Bishop takes care that the priests do not teach anything but what is conformable to the doctrine of the Church, and the unity of that doctrine among the Bishops is maintained by the necessity of each Bishop conforming his doctrine to the doctrine of the Holy See. The preaching of contradictory dogmas is nowhere

tolerated, and should it arise for a moment, it is immediately silenced. For this reason religious instruction is of such incomparable value to a Catholic; it is to him, as if God Himself spoke to him, by the mouth of the priests.

A Protestant, on the contrary, is taught by a man who, if he wishes to be sincere, ought to commence by declaring that he will try to teach him truth, but that he is not in the least able to secure it to him; that a great number of Christians, as learned and honest as himself, with regard to a great many points, hold a different opinion to that which he thinks himself obliged to defend; that his opinion to-day, is not, in all respects, his opinion of yesterday, and very likely will not remain exactly his opinion to-morrow; that he is only able to give what he possesses, namely, his private views at the present moment, concerning which the pupil himself finally must be the judge. But, so adds the orthodox (not so the modern) teacher, I offer you in the Bible an *infallible book*, which contains the entire truth which God has revealed, and which you have to study, and, as far as in your power, to understand.

That book is sufficient to you, and my instruction has in fact no other aim, than to show you, as well as I can, the way to it, and how to use it. My guidance is superfluous, as soon as you have become spiritually of age, *and it is your duty to become so.* Now, when the pupil answers: *Where did you get this book?* How do you *know* that it contains *in all its parts* God's infallible word and the *entire* revealed truth? Then the teacher, who wishes to be sincere, is obliged to answer: That book came to us from the Catholic Church, which, in virtue of the infallible authority which she claims for herself, declares that *these* writings, and *not* certain others which used formerly to be considered such by some Churches, contain *entirely* (as far as it is written) the true revelation of God. Further, that this book has been transferred to us by the Reformers, who cut out from the Catholic Bible some parts which, either for historico-critical, or for dogmatic reasons, seemed to them not the word of God.

But if the pupil declares himself not satisfied with this answer, because he cannot admit as infallible either the authority of the Catholic Church or that of the

Reformers, and considers it possible that the former may have ascribed a divine inspiration to untrue or adulterated writings, or, on the contrary, may have rejected Scriptures of divine origin; whereas the Reformers were no more justified in tearing out from Holy Scripture what they thought objectionable, than modern critics are—what *then* will be the answer of the Protestant minister who wishes to remain sincere?

Moreover, what can he answer to the pupil who says: I am *not able* to study that book, for I cannot read, and have neither time nor opportunity to learn to do so; and even if I could read, I should not be capable of understanding it, because it contains many very mysterious things far above my comprehension, for which I need an interpreter (such as I understand you are *not*), in whom I could place full and entire confidence. It is easy to say that I am *obliged* to become spiritually of age, but alas! I must labour for myself and my family, which prevents my naturally small intellectual powers from reaching a higher development.

I am afraid that *the sincere* teacher would not have

any other answer to give than this: That Almighty God certainly must have taken care that we should receive His genuine and entire revelation in the Bible, which came to us from the Catholic Church and the Reformers,—and that He will be indulgent to those who, without any fault of their own, are quite unable to read or to understand His written word. In other words: there is no reasonable argument to be given for the genuineness and completeness of the Bible (at least of the New Testament), and there is *nothing* upon which a poor man's understanding can rely to acquire the knowledge of faith which is necessary for salvation.

But why should I speak of those who are uninstructed? Put into the hands of the most able, most learned, and most acute men *a book*, to which you ascribe infallibility, without, at the same time, giving them an infallible *living interpreter* of that book, to whom they can always have access,—and you may be quite sure that the more acute they are, the more certainly will that book become to each of them a *totally different* volume, in which each of them will read something *quite distinct*, and from which they will draw

quite opposite doctrines. *What* has become of unity of faith among Protestant interpreters of the Bible, we can see; and that this would be the result was never doubtful. A truer judgment has never been pronounced than that which is contained in the following words of De Lamenais, who had left the Catholic Church when he wrote them: "*Étant posé la base d'une révélation divine indispensable pour le salut, et consignée dans un livre surnaturellement inspiré, je ne sache point d'absurdité comparable a celle d'abandonner ce livre a l'interpretation individuelle de chaque homme, savant ou ignorant, simple ou éclairé, car ces différences sont ici de nul poids; et quand les Catholiques établissent contre les Protestants la nécessité d'une autorité vivante, perpétuelle, universelle, qui détermine avec certitude le véritable sens du texte sacré, resolve tous les doutes, juge infailliblement toutes les controverses qu'il peut faire naître, ce qu'ils disent est si clair, si peremptoirement décisif, qui si l'on ne savait pas quelle est la puissance de certain préjugés inculqués dès le berceau, on croirait impossible de résister a une pareille évidence*" (quoted by M. Nicolas, in his chapter *du Protestantisme*).

For a Catholic, Holy Scripture possesses an incontestible certitude, as the word of God, because it is secured to him as such by the Church, which Christ ordered to teach, promising that He himself would remain always *with her* during that teaching. Therefore, a *Catholic* has a sound reason for the respect with which he treats that precious treasure, which cannot be taken from him either by the arbitrariness of the Reformers or by the insolence of false science. And as far as his intellectual powers and his position enable him, he exerts himself, according to the admonition of the Council of Trent, to use that treasure for the benefit of his soul and the increase of his knowledge of divine truth. Those who desire to know how entirely unfounded is the charge made against the Church of trying *to prevent* her children from reading Holy Scripture, because she has taken prudent measures, in behalf of ignorant people, to prevent *abuse* of that reading,—may consult Catholic authors upon this subject. But the faith of a Catholic does not depend upon the Bible only, or even primarily. That faith existed *before* a single part of the New Testament was written, long *before* the collection of

sacred books was completed, and much longer *before* it generally was accepted and publicly authorised by the Church. That faith, moreover, would remain immutable and unshaken, even could the Bible disappear from the earth. The contents of Holy Scripture form a principal and most important *part* of the teaching which a Catholic receives from the Church, just as the epistles of the Apostles formed an important *part* of the teaching they imparted to the primitive Christians. The Apostles, however, did not write everything they taught, and referred *principally* to their oral teaching; they did not command their successors to oblige each of the faithful to read their epistles, but instructed them *to hand down* faithfully what they had been taught to other faithful people, who in their turn might be able to teach others (2 Tim. ii. 2). In this manner the Church has always understood and discharged her duty.

The Catholic Church is to all her children *a loving mother*, who nourishes everybody according to his personal wants, and yet gives to all *the same* food; a mother, at whose bosom the child and the philosopher, the labourer and the statesman, the least

civilised Indian and the man of the highest education, the spotless virgin and the deeply fallen sinner, can find refreshment, such as each individually needs, and be abundantly satisfied; a mother, who from the infinite variety of her treasures grants to *all* the poor, that is to say, to *all* men, the same riches; who teaches each one in the language of *his own* heart, and yet imparts to all *the same* words of life; and who conducts each one by *his own* way, and yet leads all to one faith, one hope, one salvation. *Is a book able to do this?*

XIV.

For me, too, a straying and prodigal son, were this mother's arms opened with that infinite mercy, which is the mark of her being the spouse of the merciful Lord Jesus. There existed no longer any serious doubt in my mind. For, when I had read Bossuet, although *all* the arguments above related had not reached as yet that degree of stability and clearness which it obtained later by continual study,—still, I was *convinced* that the Catholic Church, and *no other*, was the Church of Christ, because with her alone are to be found the marks which Christ promised to His Church. Although I perceived that there was still much for me to inquire into, before *all* my objections against Catholic worship should be solved, and *all* my difficulties removed, I nevertheless understood that I must for the future change the seat of justice for the bench of a

student, and allow myself *to be taught* by her who received from Christ the commission to teach.

The greater part of Protestants follow another plan. They look by preference at this or that secondary thing which, in good faith, they cannot admit, and, *for that reason*, they reject the first principle of the infallibility of the Church. In like manner many infidels deny the divinity of Christ, *because* they think, in good faith, that, for instance, the results of geology contradict the Mosaic history of the creation, or that miracles are impossible, or that some passages of Holy Scripture are in opposition with each other. But such arguments are not *reasonable*, and *cannot* lead to the understanding of divine truth correctly. It is the FOUNDATION of a question at which one ought to commence an exact inquiry into truth. If you find yourself obliged by decisive arguments to accept the foundation, then you must also be ready to accept what may appear to be a necessary consequence of the principle so laid down. When you find yourself falling into absurdities which were not *apparent*, because of your incorrect or incomplete understanding, but which

really exist, so that common-sense cannot deny them, *then*, but not till then, are you justified in concluding that your fundamental principle itself, no matter how satisfactorily proved it may have appeared to you, *must* have been wrong, and that there remains nothing else for you to do save to seek another fundamental principle — unless you mean, in despair, to give up further inquiry. Thus only can you be shielded from the great danger of confounding your own fallible and mutable *opinion* of a small portion of truth *with truth itself, and of rejecting the truth because one of its consequences appears to you to be false or not sufficiently proved.*

Accordingly the question: Is Christ really the Saviour of sinners? ought to precede, and its answer ought to guide the other question: Had Christ the power of working miracles? In the same manner the Mosaic history of creation ought to be compared with the pretended results of geology, and the value of both, and their mutual connection to be weighed, *after* answering the question: Did God speak to the people of Israel through Moses? In the same manner the previous admission or rejection of the divine

inspiration of Holy Scripture, should be of great importance in interpreting those few passages which to unbelievers seem contradictory. In the same manner the question of the fallibility or infallibility of the Catholic Church ought to be decided *as a principle, before* one is justified in turning certain articles of the Catholic doctrine, or some phenomena of Catholic life, *against* that infallibility. I grant that the complete development of what is only pointed out here, would require an entire volume, but I trust that these short remarks will satisfy every earnest searcher after truth—especially every *believing* Protestant—and will explain and justify the inclination which I felt to submit myself to her dogma and precepts, as soon as I had admitted the Catholic Church to be *the Church of Christ*.

There were reasons, however, which deterred me from a sudden change. Amongst others there were, in the first place, my desire previously to penetrate deeper into the Catholic doctrine; then, the advice of the Rev. Father Claesens, and also my business of editor of a daily paper, which was *now* very burdensome to me. Of this, however, I was to be freed on

July 1st 1867. To take the decisive step, I required some quiet preparation, which I could not have found in the severe political struggle in which I then was engaged.

I continued, therefore, to take advantage of the kindness with which Father Claesens granted to me access to his library. I read the *Études* of M. Nicolas, to which work I owe more than to any other, except Holy Scripture; the writings of the converted Anglican clergyman, Dr. Newman; those of Joseph de Maistre; some works of the Spanish priest Balmés; the first half of the very large *Histoire de l'Église Catholique* by Rohrbacher; the great *Catéchisme* by Gaume, as far as the book contains a complete explanation of the whole Catholic worship; and many other works which I cannot at present remember.

I thought it better not to communicate my intention to my wife until I had decided upon it, but when she saw me spending all my leisure time in reading those books, sometimes till late at night, and consequently asked me whether I thought of becoming a Catholic, I answered in the affirmative, requesting her at the same time to leave this affair entirely

to my own inquiries and meditation. I hope that I added to this, that she would not fail to beg for me the assistance of God; whatever may be the case, I am sure she *did* do so. I know that my conversion filled her heart with that joy, which was to be expected from a sincere Christian and a loving wife.

The reading of the above-mentioned works completed my conviction of the truth of the Catholic doctrine. Nobody will require from me here an exposition of that doctrine in all its particulars, and a defence of it against the attacks of unbelief and Protestantism. The authors whom I consulted are open to every one; and there are many other excellent apologists, whose works I did not peruse, or if so, perused at a later date. The *Études* by M. Nicolas, and the *Die Katholische Wahrheit* by Von Beckedorff, I can highly recommend to everybody, on the contrary, Möhlers *Symbolik* and his defence of it against Dr. Baur are suited only to the highly educated. For the rest, it is certain that there are many opportunities of learning Catholic truth for every Protestant who desires to acquire it, because all Catholic writers

teach the same faith and agree in principles. I am only recounting how *I* was led to that knowledge of the truth, which had now developed itself into perfect certitude in my mind.

XV.

Although all doubt of the truth and genuineness of the Catholic faith had disappeared, there were still ceremonies and practices which seemed to me strange, and with which I felt I could not comply immediately and without difficulty when I returned to the Church. I was, however, able to see that, regard being had to my Protestant education, it could not possibly be otherwise, and that the wisdom of centuries must be a better guidance on this subject, than the weak understanding of a beginner; more than this, I understood that it was not allowable for me to dispute about the forms of worship with her whom I could no longer deny to be my legal teacher. I also understood that nothing but *being a member of the Church* would initiate me into her practices, and make me *conversant* with them; and that it would be absurd to wait for the results of experience without having any experience at all. In a

word, because in the *essence* of the Church I had admitted her divinity, I could not be kept back by what remained still obscure to me in her *appearance.*

My resolution was firm; I cared little for the impression which it might make upon others. I afterwards discovered that many people formed to themselves a very exaggerated idea of the moral courage which was necessary for my conversion. Certainly it caused me some pain to grieve the members of my family, but I knew this grief would be merely transient, and, at the very most, last for the present life. Moreover, could this pain be for a moment compared with the duty which God asked from me? I am grateful for the fact, that not one who is dear to me has ceased to acknowledge me on account of my conversion to the Church, and I hope that this avowal, to which Almighty God has urged me, will not have the effect of alienating any of them! On the 1st of July 1867 I was freed from the heavy duties, which for a long time had weighed on me, in the discharge of that business in which I was now chiefly engaged. For two months more I read, and meditated, and prayed, in order to prepare

myself for the hour of grace, the appointment of which I left to Father Claesens. He thought it better, in order to avoid useless notoriety, to receive me privately.

On the 4th of September 1867, I was consequently received as a member of the Church. On the same day she granted me, after as sincere and complete a confession as possible, her first blessing, by forgiving my sins, and by dispensing to me the body of our Lord. I dare not describe the sentiments of freedom, of heavenly calm and regeneration, which filled my soul when I was kneeling before the altar, and when I left the church, which I had entered as a heavily-chained and laden sinner, free from sin, and reconciled to God.

Oh, that I should not have preserved pure and unspotted the nuptial garment of that joyful day! Oh, that after such a beautiful resurrection of my soul I should have fallen again, and fallen so grievously! Oh, that I should have responded so feebly to God's mercy and to the benefits of His Church, and have dishonoured so grievously my title of Christian, which I had obtained by His special

grace! Alas! the history of my misery was not even now finished; and *when*, O Lord Jesus, *when* will it be?

However, what I have gained, *really* and *certainly*, by my return to the Church of Christ, notwithstanding my obduracy, and what I *hope* to gain still more because I am within her pale—this also I will relate sincerely in order to complete the work which I have undertaken for God's honour.

XVI.

It is, in my opinion, an incorrect interpretation of the parable of the prodigal son, to say that he was more dear to his father than his brother who remained faithful. The words: "Son, thou art always with me, and all I have is thine," sound quite different from the words: "You, generation of vipers!" with which our Lord reprimanded the hypocritical Pharisees. They are the expression of the most intimate confidence, they involve, indeed, a slight reprimand on account of a very excusable ill-humour (who but a perfect man would not have felt the same?), but also contain the assurance of the warmest paternal love. It is not the custom to make *frais de réception* for a bosom friend, who, at any time, may count ours as his own. "All I have is thine." What did our Lord on the cross possess upon earth? Nothing but His Mother. To whom did He give

her? To John who alone remained faithful, and not to Peter who had fallen.

"Thou art always with Me, and all I have is thine," thus speaks Christ to the pure of heart, to all those who have never denied Him, or caused Him grievous affliction; who, although not innocent, have never rejected Him, or despised and refused His love. To *these*, in the first place, are granted the benedictions in the Sermon upon the Mount—*their* part is, even upon earth, a foretaste of heaven. *They* are the children of the household, who daily converse with the angels and saints; whom Satan can, indeed, slightly injure but not grievously wound or mutilate.* *They* have neither to pluck out an eye, nor to cut off a hand, lest the whole body should perish.† They are the salt of the earth and the light of the world; they always rejoice, no matter what calamities

* The author no doubt means to say that there are many who have proceeded so far on the way of perfection that, by the grace of God, they keep themselves free from grievous sin—though they remain liable to fall, through their own fault, into mortal as well as into venial sin.

† It may be observed that even the most innocent man may sometimes be obliged to cut himself off from dangerous occasions as painfully as others.

may befall them, because their real life is already above.

It is not thus with him, who, for a long time, has rejected the grace of God and laden himself with grievous sins. From *such a one* you must learn the violence of the struggle, between one converted to Christ, and Satan. What deep marks does the service of sin leave behind in the soul of man, even after he has shaken off its yoke—wounds that bleed afresh after every encounter! How vehement is the wrestling against evil propensities, and a heart perverted by bad habits. From such a one alone can you learn *the whole* truth of man's corruption, of the serpent's cunning and the evil one's power, but also of the victorious power of God's mercy.

Certainly, such a man, who is weakened by continued slavery, would be overcome in the struggle against his former master, if he could not make use of the entire "armour of God," which St. Paul describes in his Epistle to the Ephesians. Covered with it, he is able to conquer the devil, to repulse his attacks, to despise his vexations, and, unhurt, to reject his evil suggestions. Every new victory

diminishes the toil of the struggle, and the injuries occasioned by defeat—for alas! defeats are not unfrequent—can immediately be repaired. With that armour even the sinner, who has fallen most deeply, can defy all power of hell and the cunning of the evil one. *Who* clothes him with this armour?

The Church to which Christ confided the distribution of His means of grace. As, in Baptism, she frees her children from the guilt of Original Sin, so she cleanses them, by the Sacrament of Penance, from the sins they have afterwards committed, and communicates to them, by the Holy Eucharist, a grace which, properly used, would enable them to sin no more, at least, not mortally.

I will speak of what *I myself* owe to the use of these means of grace. But before doing so, let me say a word concerning an objection, which I may expect from Protestants, namely: how can it be admitted and shown to agree with facts, that only in the Catholic Church, and by her Sacraments, true and lasting conversion of sinners can be produced?

In the first place, it is important here to note, by

way of answer, that according to the fundamental principles of Protestantism, by *conversion* is understood something different from what is so called by the Catholic Church. According to the doctrine of the Reformers, conversion is nothing else than the acceptance by faith of the grace of God in Christ; which—provided that this faith continues—can be lost afterwards by no sin. The moral change of the convert does not belong to the *essence* of conversion, although such a change is, in Luther's opinion, an effect which certainly follows, and in Calvin's, a necessary sign of it. This change does not, indeed, prevent even a converted and a sincere man from *continuing* to sin, which he *cannot help* doing; but Almighty God no longer imputes to him his sins. The Catholic Church, on the contrary, teaches that conversion consists in *faith, together with a life according to its principles;* that conversion is not perfect until sin be avoided; that the grace already obtained is lost again by each mortal sin; and that a Christian is in fact able to avoid mortal sin. One who is converted does not, indeed, attain absolutely to that perfection, to which he ought continually to

aspire, and can be preserved from slighter transgressions, which even the most pious commit through want of vigilance, only by special privilege of grace. Such transgressions, however, are not to be imputed to a corrupt *will*, and, therefore, do not take away the friendship of God as mortal sin does. A Catholic, therefore, by the conversion of a sinner, understands a much higher degree of moral excellence than that implied in the Protestant notion of it.

But I will not confine myself to this answer, and I willingly grant that outside the communion of the Church, as well as in it, great sinners may be *truly* converted, in the sense in which conversion is understood by the Catholic Church. What follows from this? It follows that God's mercy embraces those also who, *without their own fault*, are deprived of the knowledge of the entire truth; and that the means of grace, instituted by Christ and communicated by His Church, are not in all cases essentially necessary for salvation. This we Catholics have learned from our catechism, and we are heartily thankful that our Protestant brethren, *erring in good*

faith, provided that they acknowledge Christ as the Son of God and Redeemer of souls, *can* be saved from ruin, and purified from the most grievous sins, without the means of grace which are given to us. But we are not less thankful for possessing those means of grace, and perfectly certain it is that no salvation can be obtained by those who *wilfully* reject their use.

With regard to *myself*, my conversion undoubtedly would not have been lasting, or rather would not have been each time *renewed* without confession, which has been in God's hand the principal means of *progress* in the good, wherein I may rejoice. For, although I retract nothing of the words of bitter sorrow, which, in remembering the day of my reception into the Church, flow from my heart, nevertheless, I should conceal the truth and offend Almighty God, if I failed to say that I began from that day to *become* a new man, a good Christian; and that I have obtained the hope of *being* such one day. That progress, indeed, has not been uninterrupted. I could speak of many moments, and even of a period, at which evil again became dominant in

me; but at that period I shunned the Confessional, and my transgressions of later times lost their poisoning influence by the confession and true repentance which immediately followed them. Alas! even at present I am far from being a "hero," such as St. Paul and St. Augustine were after their conversion; but I thank God that He has granted me His grace to proceed slowly and tremulously in the path of salvation, to which I have taken so late. He lifted me up after each fall; He made my falls less serious; He has freed me from *the dominion* of sin, and taught me, although very imperfectly, to take pleasure in obeying *His* law. Without the Sacrament of Penance I should never have progressed so far.

There is nothing more consoling for a sinner than Confession; as for the virtuous Christian, there is no greater consolation than Holy Communion. Indeed, ardent and *perfect* contrition obtains God's forgiveness for a sinner, even before the absolution is pronounced by the priest, but this does not at all weaken the interior impulse *to confess* his sins, or dispense with the obligation of so doing. Until

that confession is made, your sin remains upon you; its burden continues to press you down, its remembrance torments you,* but as soon as by confession you cast it from you, your soul rises again, conscious, as she is, of her regained liberty. It is not enough for a repenting sinner that Almighty God knows him; it is good for him that at least one of his fellow-men also should know him *as he really is*, in all his misery and weakness. The undeserved esteem which is shown to him becomes insupportable; he thinks himself to be a worthless hypocrite, so long as he continues to accept that esteem, as if it were his due. If he is not able to reveal his most secret actions and thoughts to everybody, he feels obliged to do so at least to one person, and to say to him: "You are mistaken! You think I am virtuous and blameless, pure and noble, a devout and fervent Christian, and I am far from being that. I am a sinner, perhaps a greater sinner than many who are stigmatised as such by public opinion."

* The meaning of this is, that a man cannot be sure that he has had a perfect contrition, and the obligation of confession remains, so that his sin must continue to be a burden on his conscience.

An honest confession like this relieves and *purifies* him, and if it has been accompanied with a sincere repentance and a firm purpose to sin no more; if it is made to him, who has received from God the power to forgive or to retain sins in His name, and *who therefore is appointed by Almighty God* to take cognisance of sins in the *only* certain way, that is to say, by sincere confession of the guilty person; finally, if that confession is accompanied with restitution for injustice committed, as far as this can be repaired, and with such satisfaction to divine justice, as a substitute for the *temporal* punishment of sin, as is inflicted upon the sinner,—then he is *certain* to be validly *absolved* by the absolution of the priest, and his sins are *his* sins no more.

In a twofold way the frequent use of the Sacrament of Penance produced a most salutary influence upon me: it restrained me from many sins, and it prevented me from being led on by sins, already committed, to sins more and more grievous.

To confess once in his life, sincerely, all evil with which he has to reproach himself, is not so difficult for him who is firmly resolved to change for the better,

and, at the same time, declares this purpose; on the contrary, it contains something charming for a noble heart; such a wilful humiliation has a side which must exalt a person in his own eyes, and in those of others. Infinitely more difficult is it to return each time with the humiliating confession that he has not kept his purpose, and has sinned again. A great sinner who suddenly changes into a faithful servant of God appears something grand; but a sinner, who *after* his conversion sins again, and is converted again, and very soon commits fresh sins, is nothing remarkable. If he were to make men his confidants, he would only experience scorn, and distrust, and aversion. But God's mercy is greater than that of men, and its repositories and distributors are the priests, to whom we are obliged to confess our sins. The sinner knows this, and without this knowledge he would not have courage enough to accuse himself, perhaps a hundred times of the same sin, which, a hundred times, he has detested with sincere contrition; whilst if he were often to change his confessor, in order to avoid shame and humiliations in the confessional, it would

certainly be much against his spiritual interest. But although he knows, by experience, that Almighty God does not cease to forgive, as long as men do not cease to repent and to do penance, the shame of confessing each time the same sin, remains strong enough often to prevent him from sinning, even when his conscience would otherwise be silenced by his passions. This may appear to some an unworthy motive for practising virtue, and certainly the fear of the confessor's evil opinion is not the highest motive of Catholic life; but, it would only show a want of knowledge of men, if one were to deny the *great* power of this remedy for the believing but weak Catholic; moreover, it would show want of that knowledge of God, which each Christian can obtain, if one were to assert that to avoid sin for human, although not ignoble motives, such as those of which there is question here, does not please God, and, therefore, is without real fruit in spiritual life. Without deciding in what degree *my* fear of God, or *my* shame at confessing, has been the preponderating motive, I must declare it to be my positive conviction, that the

fear of confessing my sins, and also of grieving my confessor thereby, has restrained *me* from much evil. And who would not have hesitated to grieve *thee*, good Father Van den Bergh,* who now dost pray in heaven for all those whose charitable father thou wast upon earth? Indeed, it was a more worthy motive not to grieve Almighty God than not to grieve thee; but God will not have regarded it as evil, if the thought of thee, his faithful servant, enabled many in trying moments to remain firm.

In my former life I often made resolutions to change for the better, to commence on a certain day, and to fulfil them most exactly. Such purposes ordinarily remained unshaken for a day or for half-a-day, until a first transgression, sometimes of a very slight kind, annihilated them and made me put off again my proposed "holiness" until a later date. During that time, one sin more or less was not of much significance. I thought I must be *perfect* and quite irreproachable in my conscience, *or* else, that it mattered not *how far* I deviated from my ideal. So I fancied foolishly, and, without knowing it, I prac-

* One of the then Parish-priests in Rotterdam.

tised the doctrine of the Reformers, who either did not admit the necessary distinction between *mortal sin* and *venial sin*, or accepted it in a wrong sense, namely, that *every* sin for an infidel was mortal, but for a believer, on the contrary, excusable. As if Almighty God used two different measures and weights, and would not, on the contrary, exact from Christians, on account of their more extensive knowledge of the truth, a higher morality than from infidels! As for myself, my erroneous idea had the pernicious effect of making me despair of reaching *anything*, as soon as I perceived that I was not able to reach the utmost. Moreover, the consciousness of my lost innocence deprived me, for the time, of all courage. It was with me as with the pedestrian who does not care about more or less mire after he has once soiled his clothes.

It is evident that, in this manner, no sinner can make real progress in virtue. For entirely free from the stain of earth we cannot remain, although he who is clean needs only that his feet be washed. And certainly it is a rare exception, if the former slave of sin, immediately after his conversion, succeeds in

restraining himself from the commission of *every* grievous sin.

The Catholic Church taught me a better way. She has taught me not to be discouraged by daily returning proofs of my weakness, and not to think all lost if everything were not attained at once. She kept me back from further sins, even after the commission of mortal sin, by procuring for me, in the Sacrament of Penance, the means of instant purification, as soon as I was moved by a sincere contrition to confess my sins. And now Protestants may object: "that contrition itself was your purification before God, and you needed no other one,"—*I myself* have *seen*, by a dearly-bought experience, the truth of the apostolic words: "*If we confess our sins*, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity." *I* should have continued my sinful life, if I had remained deprived of that *palpable* support, which is given by the words: "I absolve thee from thy sins," which the delegate of Christ pronounces over the fallen sinner. Can a criminal forgive himself? Can a transgressor of the law of God constitute himself the exponent of God's mercy?

Were Our Lord's words, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," only a superfluous outward *indication* of a true deed of grace, or had they a real meaning and a real effect? If they had a real effect when used by Our Lord, how can the same words be superfluous and worthless, when applied *to us* by His command? To the non-Catholic, all the objections which the enemies of the Church allege against the Sacrament of Penance, may appear to be very near the truth, but every Catholic knows that not one of these objections is in the least founded upon fact. This can only be explained by its divine institution. Confession could not have maintained its place amongst men, if it had been merely a human invention, and would, no doubt, have been prejudicial had it been able to exist at all. How can it be supposed that a false consolation, an insignificant *illusion*, can persuade millions of men to reveal the deepest secrets of their lives and hearts to a person, whose personal character, nay, even in many circumstances, whose *habit* alone is the only security of his silence? And how can it be explained that this apparently insane confidence *never* has been abused, that the

history of nineteen centuries cannot show *one single* instance of the violation of the sacramental seal? According to human calculation, this violation must have *very frequently* occurred, either by personal interest or thoughtlessness, and yet it has *never* happened except, perhaps, in the imagination of some novel writer. Let Protestants try to find a *natural* solution of this mystery!

Protestants believe that confession, on account of the false peace which, in their opinion, is produced by the forgiveness of sins, must lead to sinning more unrestrainedly. One would feel inclined to admit some force in this objection, if every Catholic did not know by experience that it was false, since only a deep consciousness of sin and a sincere repentance impel one to confession, whilst the thoughtless sinner becomes each time more disgusted with confession, and always considers it an insupportable burden, so as finally to neglect it entirely. *Never* has progress in virtue with a Catholic been followed by the giving up of confession. Everybody who is acquainted with Catholic life, even if a Protestant, will be obliged to admit this assertion.

Confession—so think Protestants—must cause a continual anguish of conscience to a true Christian, because he never can know for certain, whether he has not been guilty of a grievous sacrilege, by an incomplete, that is to say, by an insincere confession.

And certainly it seems not to be easy to give an account of *every* transgression in thought, word, and action, which, for instance, one has committed in a month. But, in the first place, the strict *obligation* of confessing sin does not extend farther than to the confession of mortal sins—that is to say, of those sins, either interiorly committed, or in word or action, in which there were *deliberate will* and *grave matter*, and these sins are not so easily forgotten. Moreover, a Catholic, preparing himself, by an earnest self-examination, for a good confession, does not proceed herein in a tormenting and scrupulous manner; he does not try *to rake up* accusations against himself, as a malicious enemy would do; but he prays God to enlighten his understanding, in order that he may know his sins really committed, in their real enormity, and he co-operates in this *with good faith*, without indulgence and without exaggeration. When, after

such an examination, and after a confession conformable to it, he has received forgiveness of his sins, then he is *entirely* tranquillised, because he knows that those sins, which he may have forgotten, and for that reason may not have confessed, are forgiven him as well as the others; and that the only condition of that forgiveness consists in the obligation of confessing afterwards the mortal sins, which may recur to his mind as not being already confessed. Almighty God does not require from man more than he is capable of, and above the confessional also there is written: "*Peace to men of good will!*"

Therefore, in a worthy use of the Sacrament of Penance, all objections against it, however apparently well founded, disappear like the clouds before the light of the sun; and in this manner Confession remains the firm bulwark of Christian life, the support of the struggling, the remedy of the fallen, a scandal to the world, but a source of blessing to a Christian. Poor Protestants, who were *obliged* to sacrifice this inestimable gift of God to the false principles upon which you have reasoned!

Now I ought to speak of the Blessed Sacrament, to

which the Sacrament of Penance is often a necessary, but always a salutary preparation; but I shrink from that task on account of my unworthiness. Every time I have ventured to approach this Sacrament, the words of the Centurion: "*Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof!*" have come from the depth of my soul, but I thank God that the visit of the Lord has not always failed to leave behind it fruit; that even in this respect I may perceive an undeniable *progress* in spiritual life, by which I have obtained at least a foretaste of the blessing which the most intimate union with Christ must afford to His friends. As to the rest, unworthy that I am, I can only pray, with the author of the "Imitation of Christ," "Be Thou merciful to me, O good Jesus, sweet and gracious Lord; and grant me, Thy poor supplicant, to feel, sometimes at least, in the sacred Communion, some little of the cordial affection of Thy love, that my faith may be more strengthened, my hope in Thy goodness increased, and that my charity, being once perfectly enkindled, and having tasted the manna of heaven, may never decay. Amen."

XVII.

In no respect is my present opinion so strongly opposed to my former views as with regard to the appreciation of Catholic worship, and this change has no other cause than the knowledge I acquired by experience. I have related the impression which I received formerly from visiting a Catholic Church, and being present at Holy Mass; I have said how the priest and faithful seemed to me to be occupied with unreasonable ceremonies; I have related also how, afterwards, I acquired a more reasonable and more practical idea of it, namely, that all this exterior show must have a deep meaning, which was concealed from me, but not from those who took part in it. Even before I was received, I was taught to understand this meaning, as far as it can be ascertained from books; but the true, the *really divine* beauty of Holy Mass, he alone can understand who enters the community of the Church,

and even such as he cannot always fully do so. Only when grace is granted to him to join with his whole soul in the Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ, offered up in the name of the community, by its servant and head, the priest—only then he *sees*, with his spiritual eye, heaven and earth unite in that action which, in the highest sense, is the *greatest action* of heaven and earth; only then his soul is truly lifted up from earth at the words *sursum corda!* to prepare, by repeating the sanctus! in unison with the angels, and by adoring the Blessed Sacrament, for the reception of Christ in a real or in a spiritual Holy Communion. Such an intimate union at Holy Mass is, perhaps, often granted to devout Christians, but to me it was seldom given, and only for a few moments. But those few moments were undoubtedly the most happy of my life, and in which I could not possibly refrain from tears of joy; in which I felt *as certain* of my faith as I was of my existence; in which the light of the day was not more visible to me than the truth and sanctity of the Sacrifice of the Mass. The remembrance of those moments of complete certitude is

sufficient to expel any doubt, which a disordered state of my soul, by instigation of Satan, may raise in my mind; even when I do not *see*, I persevere in my faith, *because I have seen.*

Although, from my own experience, and from what I learned from others, I am obliged to allow that presence at Holy Mass is not ordinarily accompanied by such a blissful consolation, it still commonly produces, in a lesser degree at least, such a feeling. Protestants imagine, entirely without foundation, that Catholic worship consists more than their own in *exterior show*. The contrary is the truth. Protestants sing religious hymns which are announced to them; they join in prayer which is recited in their name; and they hear a sermon. To their own spiritual co-operation nothing is left. On the contrary, to a Catholic in Holy Mass a large field is left for personal prayer and meditation, and this without his ceasing to follow Holy Mass, and to be in union with the people. And it is a mistake to think all the faithful present, even the most simple (I speak not, of course, of certain exceptions), have not a clear understanding of all

that is either spoken or done by the priest. In Holy Mass the Latin language is used for wise reasons, but Catholics have their prayer-books, in which the literal translation is placed side by side with the Latin.

A Protestant who is present at Holy Mass will, therefore, soon perceive that nearly all the faithful, whom he sees around him, are not only attentive spectators and hearers, but also real *partakers* of a ceremony which he does not understand. He may still be surprised that this ceremony is able to make so deep an impression on them, and that it should cause much greater outward *edification*, at least, than what he has been accustomed to in his own church, but he cannot deny the fact that the congregation around him *is* most diligently occupied with the sacrificial action, which is for them of so much importance. And when the same Protestant takes the trouble to study, with a little attention, the liturgy of the Mass, he will undoubtedly grant that it ought to be praised as a splendid outburst of religious feeling.

To us Catholics it is difficult to believe that the

religious feeling of man, without being directed by the Holy Ghost, could have reached *that* beauty. I cannot but quote here a passage from Dr. Newman's "Loss and Gain: the Story of a Convert," which, in repeated reading, always struck me with the correctness of its representation. In answer to the objection, that the prayers of Holy Mass are often pronounced by the priest as quickly as if it concerned the most indifferent thing in the world, the Anglican convert, Willis, speaks as follows: "I declare, to me nothing is so consoling, so piercing, so thrilling, so overcoming, as the Mass, said as it is among us. I could attend Masses for ever, and not be tired. It is not a mere form of words,—it is a great action, the greatest action that can be on earth. It is, not the invocation merely, but, if I dare use the word, the evocation of the Eternal. He becomes present on the altar in flesh and blood, before whom angels bow and devils tremble; that is that awful event which is the scope, and is the interpretation, of every part of the solemnity. Words are necessary, but as means, not as ends; they are not merely addresses to the throne of

grace, they are instruments of what is far higher, of consecration, of sacrifice. They hurry on as if impatient to fulfil their mission. Quickly they go, the whole is quick; for they are all parts of one integral action. Quickly they go; for they are awful words of sacrifice, they are a work too great to delay upon; as when it was said in the beginning, "What thou doest, do quickly." Quickly they pass; for the Lord Jesus goes with them, as He passed along the lake in the days of His flesh, quickly calling first one, and then another. Quickly they pass; because as the lightning that shineth from one part of the heaven unto the other, so is the coming of the Son of Man. Quickly they pass; for they are as the words of Moses, when the Lord came down in the cloud, calling on the Name of the Lord as He passed by, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." And as Moses on the mountain, so we, too, make haste and bow our heads to the earth, and adore. So we, all around, each in his place, look out for the great Advent, "waiting for the moving of the water."

Each in his place with his own heart, with his own wants, with his own thoughts, with his own intention, with his own prayers, separate but concordant, watching what is going on, watching its progress, united in its consummation;—not painfully and hopelessly following a hard form of prayer from beginning to end, but, like a concert of musical instruments, each different, but concurring in a sweet harmony, we take our part with God's priest, supporting him, yet guided by him. There are little children there, and old men, and simple labourers, and students in seminaries, priests preparing for Mass, priests making their thanksgiving; there are innocent maidens, and there are penitent sinners; but out of these many minds, rises one eucharistic hymn, and the great action is the measure and the scope of it. And oh, my dear Bateman, you ask me whether this is not a formal, unreasonable service? it is wonderful, quite wonderful!"

As Christ called Himself "physician," so His Church may be also called an institution in which, for each disease of the soul, the proper remedy is to be found. It is so in reality. The heavenly

remedies provided by the Church for her children are not all essential, or even salutary, for everybody; but she gives to each sick person—and *who* dares to call himself entirely healthy?—what *he* requires in his present circumstances. But although she does not oblige her children to use any other means of grace except the Sacraments some of which, as being the properly appointed *channels of grace*, are necessary for each one of the faithful,—she possesses the right to command that nobody should despise or reject any remedy, which she acknowledges, because it seems to him to be either fruitless or tasteless. He is not bound to use it, if not suitable to his own wants, but he would do wrong if he gave way to distrust, and communicated his sentiments to others who highly esteem it, and, on account of their own experience, speak highly of its good effects. Even the most learned and most acute Catholic is aware that the Church of Christ in this respect also knows better than he, because *her* knowledge of men has not been derived from books or by study, but has been infused and secured by the Holy

Ghost. The body of the Church does not consist principally of philosophers, of men of high state and clear understanding, of educated and developed people; no, the greater part of its members are weak, needy, ignorant, and, above all, sensual men who *cannot* raise themselves up to a high degree of spirituality. And thou, Oh eminent patron of the poor human race! be honest and admit how seldom, and for how short a time, *thou* art able to remain standing on that elevated position. Since Adam's fall, there is no great spirit without a considerable mixture of narrow-mindedness; and high mountain tops are not the continual abode of even the most privileged mortals. Do not, then, say too soon with regard of a remedy which the Church has approved: it is good for women and children! for the day may come, perhaps, when *you* will experience and praise its salutary effect; you will not then become less because you reckon yourself among the little ones.

I consider it, with a grateful heart, as a good omen for myself that I learned *willingly* to follow the little ones, and I find, if I am allowed to use the expres-

sion, that many *trifles* of Catholic worship, which were formerly strange and troublesome, have now become dear to me. Certainly one will not be saved by moistening his forehead with holy water, or by a mark of reverence before the images of Christ or of the Saints, but it would trouble me if, with an affected superiority, I were to withdraw myself from that practice of the faithful. Sometimes circumstances, apparently accidental, made me understand the beauty of ecclesiastical practices which formerly were unintelligible to me. In the Litanies in honour of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, and of the Saints, I did not heartily join, until I found myself one day applying various terms of endearment to my own child. If *my* love found its natural expression in such a flow of sweet names—how then should it appear strange, that the much more fervent love of the Church should express itself in the same manner? Indeed, Litanies are senseless and tiresome for all who do not love.

In the same way it has become a consoling thought to me, that there are many among those who surround Our Lord, whose help and intercession

I may implore with especial confidence, although their intercession is not *necessary*, and although even the Mother of God cannot give me anything but her intercession. But when I call to mind what the wedding-guests at Cana owed to that intercession,—the first of Christ's miracles, wrought when His hour was not yet come—then it cannot possibly appear to me unavailing, wherefore I most sincerely address the Blessed Virgin with the beautiful hymn:

Monstra te esse Matrem!
Sumat per te preces,
Qui pro nobis natus
Tulit esse tuus.*

A Catholic is aware that the properly-constituted precepts of the Church are far from being burdensome. For the sake of Protestant readers, it may be mentioned here that they are the following: To keep certain days holy, with the obligation of resting from servile works. To hear Mass on all Sundays and Holy-days of obligation. To keep the days of fasting and abstinence appointed by the Church. To go to Confession at least once a year. To receive the

* Show Thyself a Mother! Through thee may He receive our prayers Who, born for us, chose to be Thy Son.

Blessed Sacrament at least once a year, and that at Easter or thereabouts. Not to marry within certain degrees of kindred, nor to solemnise marriage at the forbidden times."

I can honestly declare that it does not cause me the least trouble or appreciable sacrifice to obey these precepts, and, on the contrary, that I really delight in obeying them. The *obligation* of fasting appears no longer to me to impede Christian liberty, since my idea of that liberty has become clearer. Indeed, there exists no other liberty for a Christian, than to obey willingly; and the beautiful words of St. Augustine, "*Love and do what you wish*," in which the whole Christian morality is included, do not mean that he, who loves Christ and His Church, may consider himself exempt from every precept, but, on the contrary, that the love of a Christian *certainly* and *necessarily* produces the true keeping of the precepts of Christ and those of His Church. A *true* Christian can do what he wishes, because he *cannot* wish anything but to satisfy the commands of Christ and of His Church, with which Christ will remain until the consummation of the world. Concerning the

effects of fasting, I have in some degree experienced the truth of these words of St. Leo the great: "Fasting restrains concupiscence, expels temptation, curbs pride, cools anger, and ripens the inclinations of the good will to true virtue; but on condition that it is accompanied with works of charity and mercy; for fasting without almsdeeds is no purification of the soul, but torture of the body."

For a man of fine religious feeling, for a Christian poet, there exists no more beautiful picture than what is presented in the liturgical year of the Catholic Church. Each season, each day, receives from her its particular consecration; the entire Christian system is visibly represented to the faithful during the course of the year. Everybody who has faithfully joined in each festival and in each solemnity of the Church, as it comes round, possesses a more profound knowledge of Christianity than he could have gathered from a thousand theological works. Herein consists a great advantage which Catholics have over Protestants, by which even the simple and the ignorant, without exertion, are enabled to become *well-instructed* Christians.

Often was I surprised when I perceived how Catholics, without exception of state and intellectual powers, were thoroughly *conversant* with their religion; and how every incident of the life and the passion of Our Lord was represented to their minds as a fact, which not only *happened* nineteen centuries ago, but which *happens* again each year. This is the reason of that peculiar ornamentation of the Church on great festivals, as well as those signs of mourning in Holy Week, which formerly were so troublesome and tasteless to my high wisdom. What then seemed to me to be childish and unworthy of God, appears now to me childlike, and, for that very reason, agreeable to God, for He requires that our conversation with Him be like that of children with their father. Do *you* not like those flowers on the festival of Our Lord's birthday, profound philosopher, then do not look at them, and if your *heart* is filled with heavenly joy, then the absence of flowers will not be prejudicial to you; if *you* feel grievous sorrow on the day of our Lord's crucifixion, pure spiritual Christian, then the external signs of sorrow in the Church are superfluous to *you*, but there are thousands who are less profound

and less spiritual than you, there are thousands of *ordinary* men for whom those external things are either necessary or useful, there are also poets, and children, and *innocent souls*, to whom those external things are edifying and dear. And why should not men offer to God the most beautiful and most costly things they have, namely, flowers and precious stones? Indeed, neither Almighty God nor His Saints require them any more than Christ requires magnificent churches, but *our love* will naturally show itself in the same manner as did that of Mary Magdalen. Read over again the beautiful history of what took place at the table of Simon the Pharisee, and leave off blaming Catholics, after our Lord has declared them free from blame, and extolled them. *Whenever* I hear the reproach, that too much money is thrown away upon the ornamentation of churches and altars, I fancy I see the hypocritical face of the traitor Judas, as he reprimanded the repenting sinner for her extravagance. But our Lord said: "Amen, I say to you: wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which she hath done shall be told for a memory of her."

XVIII.

My task is finished, my history is at its end. God has helped me to speak the truth of myself, however much its confession has sometimes grieved me. It may be objected that I have gone too far in revealing the secrets of my life; I believe that I could not have spoken more cautiously without becoming insincere.

If this history is of any importance; if, which may God grant, its perusal should produce upon others some small part of the good effects which its composition produced upon me, it will be only because I gave in it, as far as was in my power, a *true* and *complete* image of my soul. By the concealment of certain features I should have falsified that image, and, moreover, like Ananias and Saphira, have told a lie before God.

The reader now knows what I was, and what I have become. Whatever the latter may be, how-

ever great a distance may still separate me from being a true follower of Christ, much greater, I dare say, is the distance through which I have gone in rising from the lowest abyss of my corruption. This is the work of the grace of God in Christ, which I hope will never entirely fail me! And this grace I have obtained by means of that Church, whose visible chief is the successor of Peter, whose Spouse and King is our Lord Jesus Christ. Is it to be wondered that I love, with all the power of my soul, *her* who has taught and given me *everything!*

Roman Catholic Church, Holy Mother! May God protect and govern thee. May He grant thee consolation in thy sufferings, strength in thy persecution! May He make thee triumph over all thy enemies, may He cause thy light to shine before all the world, and unite in thee all true Christians! Amen.

THE END.

PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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HOEVEN, H.A. des Amorie Vander

AUTHOR

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